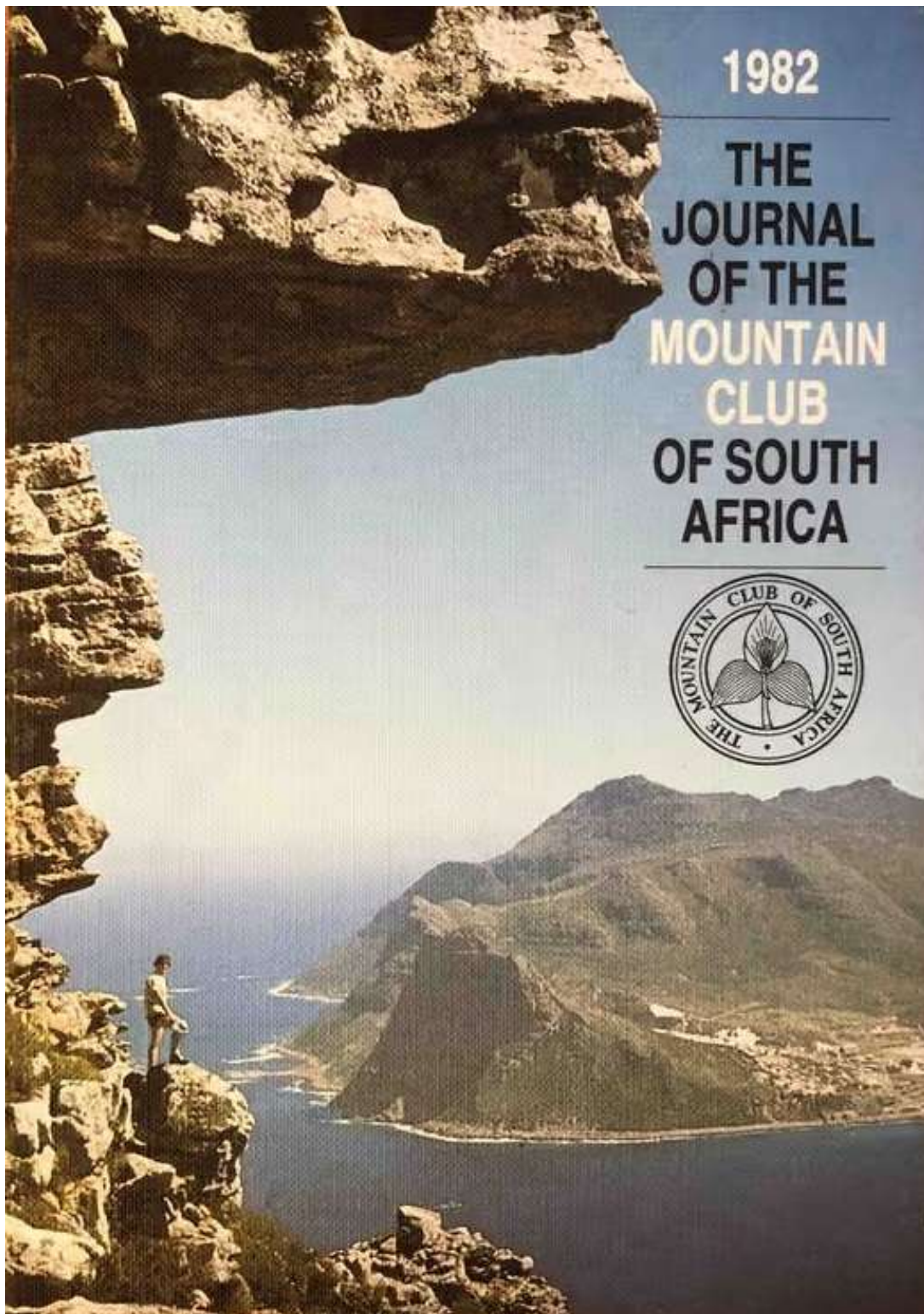


New Routes and other Rock Climbing Articles

by Gavin D Peckham

published in the Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa



The Following Items are Attached:

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- 1997-Two New Routes on the Carbineers. Vol 100, pp 233-234
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- 2007-New Route - Beacon Buttress, West Gulley. Vol 110, pg 142
- 2008-Mapping the Drakensberg - The Great Tyvek Controversy. Vol 111, pp 105-108
- 2008-Pinnacle Gorge - Jewel of the Eastern Cape. Vol 111, pp 126-128
- 2009-My Near Fatal Shunting Accident. Bruce Sobey. Vol 112, pp 103-105
- 2013 Canyon of Dreams by Tony Lourens. SA Mt Mag, #46, Sept 2013 pp 6-15
- 2013 Jack & the Beanstalk by AvT. Vol 116, pp 120-123
- 2014-Cathedral Rock by Gavin Raubenheimer. Vol 117, pp 107-111
- 2014-The Spout. A new Route on Garden Castle. Vol 117, pp 129-132
- 2016-Klipkloof. Poem by Gerhard Greef. Vol 119, pp 51-55
- 2018-Gavin Peckham in SA Mountain, Dec 2018, pp 42-43

ENCOUNTERS WITH ANIMALS

GAVIN PECKHAM

Encounters with wildlife are an appealing feature of hiking and climbing in the Drakensberg. Buck and raptors are often seen from a distance, but close encounters are usually more memorable - the berg adder you nearly stepped on and the lammergeyer which made you duck instinctively as it swished into view from around a rockface, only metres above your head. One really remembers the encounters of a more personal nature ...

We had a trip of mixed fortunes when Gavin Raubenheimer and I took a week's leave aiming to climb every peak in the Cathedral range. We planned to start with a 'loosener' on Twins Peak, work our way systematically across that fabulous skyline, and finish with a whimper on the three Puddings - just for the sake of completeness. Ah - the best laid plans of mice and men, especially of the mice!

As we arrived at Twins Cave it began to drizzle. We scrambled up Twins Peak, then came back and settled into the cave for the night, brimming with confidence for the success of our 'mission'. We woke to find, of course, that a steady rain had set in. But what of it - we had time on our hands.

It rained steadily for days. Brief breaks in the weather gave us the opportunity to make speedy ascents of the Mitre and Ntonjelane Needle, but for the rest of the time we were confined to the cave. As the hours and days dragged by the cave rats became bolder and bolder. Our books had long since been finished and the rats soon became our primary source of amusement as we waited for a break in the weather.



Pot cleaners in Twins Cave

Gavin Peckham

A pot in which we had carelessly burned some food was speedily and efficiently cleaned by our busy little companions. By the fourth day they were so tame we were able to feed them by hand. It was with feelings of warm regard that we left them on the fifth day and trudged back down Mlambonja Pass in the pouring rain, mission unaccomplished.

This was not my first experience of hand-feeding animals in the Drakensberg. When Rodney Owen and I climbed the S-route on the Rhino we ended up sharing our lunch on the summit with a large lizard which fed quite fearlessly from our hands. This redistribution of sustenance was not, however, always voluntary. My first experience with marauding baboons had us picking up our last packet of rice, grain by grain with tweezers, from the dusty floor of Zulu Cave. But that was nothing compared with the white-necked ravens of Bell Cave.

Mike Maxfield and I had ensconced ourselves in Bell Cave for four days with the intention of climbing every route of significance in the immediate vicinity. As we returned to the cave on the first afternoon we saw two bloated white necked ravens stagger out. They trundled laboriously across the ground and eventually achieved an airborne state by throwing themselves over the edge of a small rock band, wings outspread like demonic little hang-gliders.

The cave looked as though a bomb had hit it. The ravens had unzipped the lower section of my pack and had decimated our food supply. Tattered fragments of paper, foil and plastic were scattered everywhere. This manoeuvre had been conducted with a slickness indicative of constant practice - we were clearly not the first victims of this delinquent pair. We had three more days of excellent climbing, sustained by the strict rationing of our remaining resources - two apples and a box of cheese wedges. We dreamed of food each night.

But, to return to baboons. We have all heard stories of baboons throwing rocks at climbers. Along with a colleague who shall remain nameless, I experienced this first-hand on the west face of the Inner Tower. On starting up this face we had seen a troop of baboons disappear around the northern skyline and had thought nothing more about it until they reappeared on a ledge some 40m above us.

At this stage we were belayed on a narrow ledge, getting ready to start the next pitch. We were acutely aware of the problem, but before we could extricate ourselves from this precarious position, down came a boulder the size of a pumpkin. My companion must have sensed or heard it coming and glanced up. The boulder skimmed his face, thumped his hand a glancing blow and then thundered away into the abyss below.

Blood spewed everywhere. We flattened ourselves against the rock, but nothing more came down and the baboons soon moved off. After stemming the flow of blood with a spare T-shirt we discovered that the lacerations, by a miracle, were relatively minor. If my companion had not changed the position of his head by glancing upwards at the critical moment, the boulder would have hit him squarely on the crown and the story would have ended quite differently. "Helmet?" I hear you ask. So had I, on several previous occasions. "Climbed all over the Lake District in the 60s. Didn't use one then and don't need one now!" But there are no stone-throwing baboons in the Lake District. It was 20 minutes before he stopped shaking. He has never climbed again.

New routes in the

NATAL DRAKENSBERG

GAVIN PECKHAM

The following notes describe some new routes in the Natal Drakensberg. The climbs are described as they occur from north to south along the range.

1. **BEACON BUTTRESS: North West Ridge (F3)**
(Beacon Buttress is also known as the Western Buttress).

Approach: The ridge lies between the Sentinel/Beacon Buttress neck on the left and the Beacon Buttress Gully on the right. From the path to the Chain Ladder, walk up to the first rock step at the end of the ridge. Start below an orange, overhanging block which is about 10m up.

Route:

1. 45m F3: Climb up for about 5m (D), traverse left about 3m (E) to the base of a short, shallow recess with some grass. Climb the recess (4m F3, crux) to a narrow rock ledge. Optional belay at this point. Continue straight up the ridge for about 30m (D/E) on mixed rock and grass and belay on a grassy shoulder near the start of the next vertical rock step.
2. 40m F1: From the previous belay, scramble about 5m, part way down a steep narrow gully to the left. As you face down the gully there is a ramp on your right. Ascend the ramp (5m, D) to a grass ledge and walk a short way to the base of a broken recess/crack/chimney which is climbed (6m, F1). Continue easily up the ridge and belay when the next major grass band is reached. Walk up to the obvious start of the next pitch at the base of the next rock step.
3. 30m E: Climb up past a small, suspect block to a good layback crack and continue up to the base of a difficult recess which is not climbed. Traverse out left, about 5m along a narrow rock ledge and belay (#2 to #3 Cams only) on the ledge at the base of another recess.
4. 20m F2: Climb the recess (4m, F2), traverse a few moves to the right, back up diagonally left, and then continue upwards on easy rock and grass to belay at the next major grass band. Walk up to the final rocky section and scramble to the top (200m, C), keep



*Above: View towards Cathedral Peak and Outer Horn.
Below: View towards Mweni area and Pinnacles*

Neil Griffin.



ing to the left as far as possible. Descend via Beacon Buttress Gully.

Comment: This line offers good varied climbing and is highly accessible, being barely 30 minutes walk from the Sentinel car park.

Opening party: Gavin Peckham, Ivan van Cleef and Gavin Raubenheimer. (21 November 1996)

2. MT AMERY FANG (F3)

Approach: This fang is situated in a narrow cutback near the south face of Mt Amery. Access to the fang is from a gully on the north side of this cutback. Abseil down the first 5m step in this gully and pull down the rope. Scramble down to the next step. Tie in a fixed rope and abseil 15m down a wide chimney, behind a large chockstone. Although one can scramble down to the nek from here, it is quicker and safer to abseil right to the end of the first rope. If the gully is wet and slippery, a second fixed rope may be desirable.

Route:

1. 40m C: From the nek walk left along a narrow grass ledge that runs across the east face. Half way along, this grass ledge peters out for a few metres and requires a couple of exposed moves across steep rock and around a slight corner before the grass ledge continues. Just before the end of the ledge, scramble up a couple of metres to a small stance next to a belay block at the start of the first rock ramp.
2. 45m F3: Climb the first rock step (F2). A blade peg is useful. Walk along a narrow grass ledge and climb the next step (F3). Walk along the next grass ledge and climb the final step (D). Continue (easy) to reach the north arête at a point about 30m above the nek.
3. 40m F2: Climb straight up the north arête to the summit.

Descent: Abseil down the top pitch and then down to the nek.

Comment: Despite the poor rock at the nek, the rock throughout the rest of this route is very good. The summit is undoubtedly the smallest in the Berg - an absolute pin point. You can stand next to it, but certainly not on it. Ascending the chimney in the gully provides some textbook 'foot and back' chimneying when dry. The fang can be reached in under four hours from Sentinel car park.

Opening Party: Gavin Peckham and Ivan van Cleef. (23 November 1996)

3. INNER MNWENI NEEDLE: South East Ridge (E)

Approach: From the path to Rockeries Pass, walk up the valley which leads all the way up to the nek between the two Needles.

Route: Use the same first pitch as the 'standard' route i.e. 30m D straight up from the nek to reach a narrow grass band. Traverse well left until able to scramble up a fair way and reach a very broad grass band. Cross this band to reach the base of the towering east face. Walk left along the base of the east face to a slab. Scramble up this slab to a narrow grass ledge which is followed left and slightly up to gain the south east ridge which forms the left hand skyline. Three D-grade pitches with the odd E-grade move, and some scrambling in between, lead almost straight up this ridge to the summit.

Comment: This is a pleasant line on good rock. Apart from being somewhat quicker than the original route, it is more direct and avoids the 'tricky' 10m F crack. Abseil back down the route.

The summit can probably be reached by following the crest of the south east ridge all the way from its start, at the river fork 500m south of the 2 193m spot height on the Slingsby map. This would save a long grovel up the gully to the nek and would make the route independent of the first pitch of the original route.

Opening Party: Gavin Peckham and Frank Boase. (28 October 1995)

4. OUTER MNWENI NEEDLE: South West Ridge (F2)

Approach: Scramble up to the nek between the two Needles. Go over the nek and down the other (north) side for about 50m. Traverse about 200m east towards the Outer Needle. This traverse leads around the bases of some minor pinnacles and reaches a steep, but easy, scree-filled gully. Follow this gully up to a nek between the minor pinnacles and the Needle itself.

Route: From the nek friction up a steep smooth slab (5m D) to reach a broad grass band. Walk up across the broad grass band, heading slightly right, to the obvious start of the next pitch.

1. 40m E: Climb up to a horizontal line of grass. Traverse right along the grass line until able to climb up further. Belay on a sloping grass shoulder. Walk up onto a broad, gently sloping grass ridge and then follow the crest of this ridge for about 200m to where it ends at a vertical rock step.
2. 25m F2: Climb the rock step and belay on a turret of rock.
3. 25m F1: Climb or jump down 2m to a flat 'table top' of rock.

-
4. Traverse left around a corner for a couple of moves to gain a steep ramp. Climb the ramp, move right, then up to a stance.
25m E: Climb a recess/open book and belay at a point where the steep rock ends. From here rocky a ridge involving some C-grade scrambling leads to the summit.

Comment: This is a good line and the rock, except for the first pitch, is excellent. Highly recommended.

Opening Party: Gavin Peckham and Ivan van Cleef. (6 September 1996)

5. CATHEDRAL PEAK: North East Ridge (E)

Approach: Walk in along the main path to Cathedral Peak. The route forms the right hand skyline of the peak as viewed from the traverse between the top of Orange Peel Gap and the bottom of Bugger Gully. Walk up Bugger Gully to a grassy shoulder at a point about 50m below the neck between Cathedral Peak and the gendarme, where the gully steepens substantially. From here, walk a couple of hundred metres to the right along a very broad grass band to reach the north east ridge which forms the right hand skyline.

Route: Scramble straight up the north east ridge through a succession of rock bands, alternating with grass. This involves about 200m of C-grade scrambling with the odd D-move and leads to a point where the overall gradient steepens sharply.

From here a 20m C-grade scramble leads to a smooth, rounded ramp (about 5m). The ramp ends in a short, vertical rock band which is climbed on its right (crux). The rock band is about D-grade with one or two E moves and is very exposed. A rope is probably a wise precaution at this point. Further C-grade scrambling with the odd D-grade move leads straight up the ridge to the summit.

Comment: The route is appealing in that it is an absolutely direct line, straight up the crest of the north east ridge on good rock all the way. The last 80m section of this route coincides with the Standard Route.

Opening Party: Gavin Peckham and Ivan van Cleef. (13 October 1996)

6. INNER HORN: South Gully Scramble (D)

Approach: From the Twins-Bell traverse path, scramble to the neck between the Horn and the Chessmen. Scramble down the other (Mlambonja) side for a short distance, past the Standard Route, until it is possible to start walking out along the broad grass band around to the south side of the Horn. Walk about 200m along the grass band and

around a slight corner. A steep grassy gully with a few rocky steps leads diagonally left to the top.

Route: Easy scrambling leads to a chockstone about half way up the route. Gain the top of this chockstone by squeezing through below and behind it. From the top of this stone a couple of C moves give access to the next grassy section. The last few metres become steep and a couple of D moves on good rock lead to the summit.

Comment: This is the easiest way to the top of the Inner Horn, now that the belay block on the Standard Route has fallen off.

Opening Party: Gavin Peckham. (2 January 1995)

7. INNER HORN: South Face: Hidden Chimney Route (E)

Approach: From the start of the South Gully Scramble, walk about a further 200m along the grass band and around another slight corner, to reach a broad grass gully which leads up to two adjacent chimneys about 10m apart. To the right of these chimneys is a buttress with an obscured grass gully on its right. This gully leads up to the left and disappears behind the buttress. The route goes up the chimney at the back of this 'hidden' gully. Although one can scramble directly up to the route, it is much easier to scramble up to the base of the two adjacent chimneys and then walk to the right on a narrow grass ledge which leads all the way around the buttress to the bottom of the route.

Route: The chimney contains several chockstones, three of which can be threaded. The first is small and loose, the second is ideal and the third is large and needs a long sling (and reach). Climb until able to reach up and thread the third chockstone and then traverse out left on good rock past a pocket to a second pocket from which a few tufts of grass sprout. Climb up through this pocket then continue up heading slightly left to exit. (One pitch).

Opening Party: Gavin Peckham and Mike Maxfield. (31 December 1994)

8. INNER HORN: South Face: Big Flake Route (E)

Approach: This route goes up the buttress which conceals the Hidden Chimney Route. Scramble up into the 'hidden gully'. When one views the (left) edge of the buttress from within the 'hidden gully', a 6m vertical crack is seen about halfway up. This crack separates a big flake from the main buttress.

Route: Climb straight up through the crack to the top on good rock all

the way. (One pitch).

Comment: This is an easy, direct and pleasant line. These routes on the south face of the Inner Horn can be reached in about an hour and a half from Bell Cave.

Opening Party: Gavin Peckham and Mike Maxfield. (31 December 1994)

9. THE SPIRE (F3)

Approach: Walk north from the top of Leslie's Pass for 40 minutes to reach this impressive pinnacle which is located between the Old Woman and the Ape. Tie in a fixed rope on the very lip of the escarpment a few metres north of a point directly above the nek between the escarpment and the Spire. Abseil down 15m over a narrow grass ledge and then another 20m to a much larger grass ledge. Tie a second fixed rope onto the end of the first (no other secure point was found) and abseil a further 30m to the nek.

Route: From the nek walk right, along a grass ledge to a grass shoulder on the south side.

1. 35m F3/A0. From the grass shoulder, climb straight up on easy rock to a vertical recess/open book which is climbed (crux) and which is capped by a small roof. At the roof, move out right on small holds for a couple of metres and then up a metre or two to a tiny stance with excellent gear placement. Climbers following the leader should probably climb through to the next stance.
2. 10m E. From the stance, climb out left around a large block to gain a grass ledge. Scramble up, then left, and belay at the base of a short black face.
3. 30m F2. Climb the short black face by one of various routes, a layback crack 3m up being one of the nicest. Continue up on steep grass to a final rock band which is climbed to a good belay. Scramble to the top.

Descent: Abseil off a block near the last belay to the tiny stance at the top of pitch 1. From here, abseil off a peg to the grass shoulder. Walk back to the nek. Prussik 30m up the first rope to the main grass ledge. Bypass the next rock step via a steep grass gully to the left. Prussik up the last 15m to the escarpment.

Comment: An excellent climb somewhat spoilt by a difficult approach.

Opening Party: Gavin Peckham, Ivan van Cleef and Richard Knott. (7 December 1996).

10. OUTER MASHAI FANG: North Face (F1/F2)

Approach: Approach up the gully to the south of the Mashai Fang Ridge and then scramble up to the base of the chimney which leads to the nek between the Inner and Outer Fangs.

Route:

1. 30m E. Chimney up to the nek between the two Fangs. (This is the same as Pitch 1 of the original route.) Walk along the grass ledge which runs from the nek across the north face. Belay at two pegs about half way along this ledge.
2. 30m D. From the pegs, walk to the left and start near the left (east) skyline. Climb about 10m up and slightly right, then traverse right and slightly up for about 15m, then up a few metres to belay in a small recess at the centre of the North Face.
3. 15m D. Either climb straight up for about 5m (tricky) or gain the same position by moving right, then up, then back left.
4. 15m F1. Start up a recess and climb straight up to a horizontal knife-edge which is just below and west (right) of the summit block.
5. 4m F2. Climb the corner in the west side of the summit block. Alternatively, follow Pitch 5 of the original route (10m, D).

Descent: Abseil off a block on the summit, down the north face to the grass ledge (40m). Abseil back down pitch 1. Ignore the suggestion in the original RD to keep on abseiling down the north face. Going back down the first pitch is much quicker.

Comment: The start of this route can be reached in about an hour and a half from Pillar Cave. The summit was reached after an hour and a half's climbing - half the time of the original route - and the ascent could take even less time if one climbed straight up from the pegs to the summit in a single 40m pitch.

Opening Party: Gavin Peckham and Richard Knott. (5 August 1995).



Neil Griffin



TWO NEW ROUTES ON THE CARBINEERS LANGALIBALELE PASS AREA, KWAZULU-NATAL DRAKENSBERG

GAVIN PECKHAM

On 4 November 1873 men loyal to the Zulu chief, Langalibalele, were involved in a skirmish with the troops of the Natal Carbineers at the top of a pass which is now named after the chief. By the end of the skirmish five of the Carbineers were dead. Peaks to the south of Langalibalele Pass were subsequently named Erskine, Bond, Potterill, Kambule and Katana after the fallen troops.

These peaks are all linked to and easily accessible from the escarpment. Yet to date, the MCSA *Journals* have no recorded frontal ascents. The situation has now changed, as two of the Carbineers, Erskine and Bond, have recently been climbed.

A. ERSKINE: North-East Ridge F2 16

The north-east ridge abuts on to Erskine about 100m north of the highest point on the peak. It consists of four major steps and is clearly visible from almost anywhere in the vicinity of Langalibalele Pass.

Approach: Walk up the pass until the path crosses the Bushmans River about half-way up. Walk about another 300m up the pass to a point where the path crosses a side stream coming in from the south. Up this side stream is a black face, over which the stream falls in summer. Leave the path and walk up towards the black face. Scramble up through the rock bands on the left of the face. Continue heading up and left towards the base of the ridge. The final part of the scramble goes straight up a steep grassy gully through a rocky outcrop near the start of the ridge.

1. 40m F2 16: Scramble up the centre of the first step making a couple of F1 (14) moves to reach a narrow grass ledge which runs off to the left. Traverse left on this ledge for about 10m to where it peters out. Climb up about 5m to an overlap. From here there are two alternatives: either climb straight up for another few metres to the grassy shoulder above (hard!), or move out left. The second alternative involves two or three F2 (16) moves on tiny handholds and friction footholds to reach a good jug which enables you to pull through and up on to steep grass. These committing moves are very exposed and look much more impressive than they actually are.
2. 40m F2 16: Scramble up just left of centre on the second step to reach a short, awkward open book. Stem up this and exit diagonally left up on to a grass shoulder. Walk a few metres around to the right until able to climb up easily to a stance behind some loose blocks at the start of the next pitch.
3. 20m F1 14: Walk to the right and then climb diagonally right, up a groove in a slab. From here two or three moves up and to the left take you to easier ground. Belay at some blocks on a large grass shoulder.
4. 30m F2 16: Climb a slab for a couple of metres until you can mantleshelf on to a narrow rock ledge. Balance diagonally left up a groove on the left of the ledge. Climb straight up to a small overhang, with ease. Move out to the left and then up on good holds to the grass band above.
5. 30m C: Scramble to the top.

First Ascent: 29 March 1997

Opening Party: G Peckham and R Knott

Notes: The route can be reached in four hours from the camp at Giant's Castle and the climb takes about three hours. To facilitate good rope management it may be best to split the first pitch into two. This is an excellent route and is highly recommended. Descend via Langalibalele Pass.

B. BOND: East (Frontal) Ridge F3 18

Approach: From the contour path near Langalibalele Pass the main east ridge of Bond is prominent and is broken about halfway up by a single, major rock band which may be negotiated by one of several possible routes. Once above the rock band, head for a prominent rock turret further up the ridge. If approaching from the north side of the ridge, walk left around the base of this turret to the south side and scramble up to gain the nek between the turret and the upper part of the ridge. From here scramble up easily on mixed rock and grass for some distance until the gradient of the ridge suddenly steepens.

1. 45m F3 18: Climb the steep vegetated gully just right of the ridge to reach a stance in a cubby-hole off to the left-hand side of the gully. Horrible, but generally easy with a few tricky moves.
2. 30m D 8: Climb out left from the cubby-hole then continue up the ridge to a large grass band. Walk up across the grass band then scramble through a short rock band to a second large grass band. Walk up to the highest point on the right-hand side of this grass band and belay from here. Some metres above and to the right of this point, an obvious and initially overhung crack leads to the summit and awaits those bold enough to try it.
3. 25m F1 14: Climb up towards the start of the crack, but then turn and move up into a left-sloping gully which is not visible from the stance. Climb up and left on a short slab with good holds until able to traverse left and around a corner on to a narrow rock ledge which leads across the base of a large slab. Belay from some good cracks halfway along this ledge.
4. 25m F3 18: Climb straight up from the stance using friction and tiny holds. After about 5m the slab leans back a little. Continue straight up using a good crack on the right. Exit by moving out right and then up for the last few metres.

First Ascent: 5 April 1997

Opening Party: G Peckham and A van Tonder

Notes: An unpleasant first pitch spoils this route. However the top two pitches are superb. Descend via Langalibalele Pass.

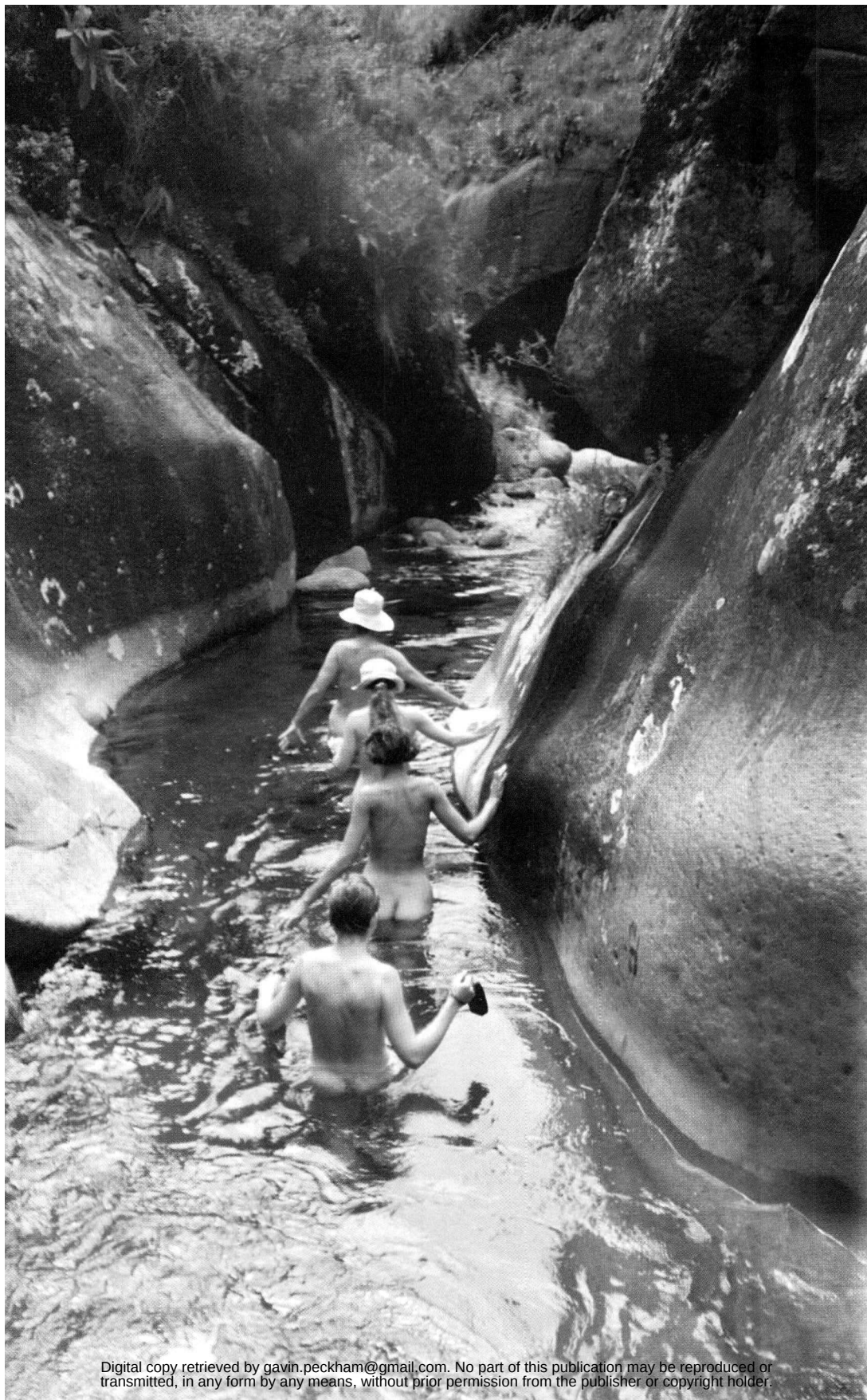


Erskine and Bond as seen from the contour path

GAVIN PECKHAM

Summer days in the Mhlwazine Valley, KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg

GREIG STEWART



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NEW ROUTES

IN THE NATAL DRAKENSBERG

Gavin Peckham

POTTERILL : East Ridge (E)

Approach: Start where the prominent east ridge of Potterill cuts the contour path. From this point, walk straight up the crest of the broad grass ridge for several hundred metres until the first rock band is reached.

Route:

1. *20 m C:* Scramble up the rock band keeping towards the left. Continue walking up the crest of the grass ridge to a small nek at the base of a second rock band.
2. *30 m D:* Climb straight up the centre of the rock band. Continue up the crest of the ridge to the next, major rock step. On the way, it is necessary to scramble up a short, narrow rock arête and, further on, up a 5 m vertical rock step.
3. *25 m E:* Start a couple of metres left of the crest of the ridge and climb up an easy broken recess to a narrow grass ledge. Climb the right hand side of a short, orange open-book. Step left across the top of the open-book and continue to traverse delicately left for a couple of metres until it is possible climb straight up on easier rock. Scramble up for about 150 m along an easy rock ridge to reach the summit.

Descent: Descend via Jarateng Pass (closest) or Langalibalele Pass. The gully between Potterill and Mt. Durnford looks very quick and easy, but we have not actually tried it.

Opening Party: Gavin Peckham and Eugene Parsons. (14/12/1997)

NTONJELANE NEEDLE: East Face (D)

Approach: Follow the approach to the standard route by climbing through the hole in the ridge. Instead of climbing directly up onto the ridge, walk across to the nek between the Needle and the first Chessman. The top of the Needle lies directly above this nek.

Route: Climb straight up from the nek on easy rock and grass to the summit block, which is climbed on the left-hand side.

Comments: This route can be reached in about two hours from Bell Cave. It is much quicker and easier than the standard route and

requires only one pitch of climbing instead of two. Abseil back down the route off a block on the summit.

Opening Party: Gavin Peckham and Mike Maxfield. (01/01/1995)

CATHEDRAL PEAK : North East Ridge

Comment: The 1996 MCSA Journal contains a description of this route in which I accepted credit as a member of the opening party. I have subsequently received a letter from Martin Winter in which he relates how he climbed this route back in 1958. His letter was accompanied by a photocopy of detailed notes and sketches that he made at the time. These are correct in every detail and I have no hesitation in relinquishing any claim to the first ascent of this line. Martin indicated that even back in 1958 there were rumours of another party having previously climbed the route. It was for this reason that he decided not to publish his route description. Details of the genuine first ascent are probably lost in the mists of time. The route, however, remains a direct and pleasant line by which to reach the summit of Cathedral Peak.

UNWABU: Frontal Route (D)

Approach: From the top of Mike's Pass, walk past the start of Organ Pipe's Pass and down Phillip's Folly. Continue along the path past Schoongezicht Cave and past the start of Tlanyaku Pass. At its southernmost extremity the path makes a sharp turn, crosses the upper Ndedema River and then zig-zags up Eastman's Ridge. Just before, and just after, the river crossing are two broad grass ridges which sweep up to the south-west. The two ridges are separated by a gentle depression but merge higher up near a prominent knoll. Walk up either ridge, bypass the knoll and then continue up the ridge towards the rock face above. There is a large, narrow, rocky ridge on the left-hand side of the main rock face. This narrow ridge slopes up to, and abuts onto, the rock face.

Route: By one of various routes, scramble up onto the ridge - grade C or D depending on your choice. Continue carefully up the ridge to the point where it abuts onto the main rock face. From here scramble along a ledge of mixed rock and grass which rises diagonally to the right in a series of steps. This ledge crosses the entire frontal face and requires some D grade moves. From the end of the ledge, turn to the left and scramble up the obvious line to the summit. Descend by the same route.

Comments: An appealing line straight up the frontal face proved too difficult, so we followed the line of least resistance described above. The peak comes within a hair's breadth of being a free-stander, but is

unfortunately connected to the escarpment by a curving knife-edge of rotten rock. When viewed from the valley below, the peak blends so completely with the escarpment that it is not possible to discern its existence. For this reason we thought that the Zulu name for a chameleon, “Unwabu”, was appropriate. This name also makes a suitable companion for Isikhova (the Owl) which is located at the head of the adjacent ridge to the south.

Opening party: Gavin Peckham, Carl Fatti and Tristan Firman (27 /9/ 1997).

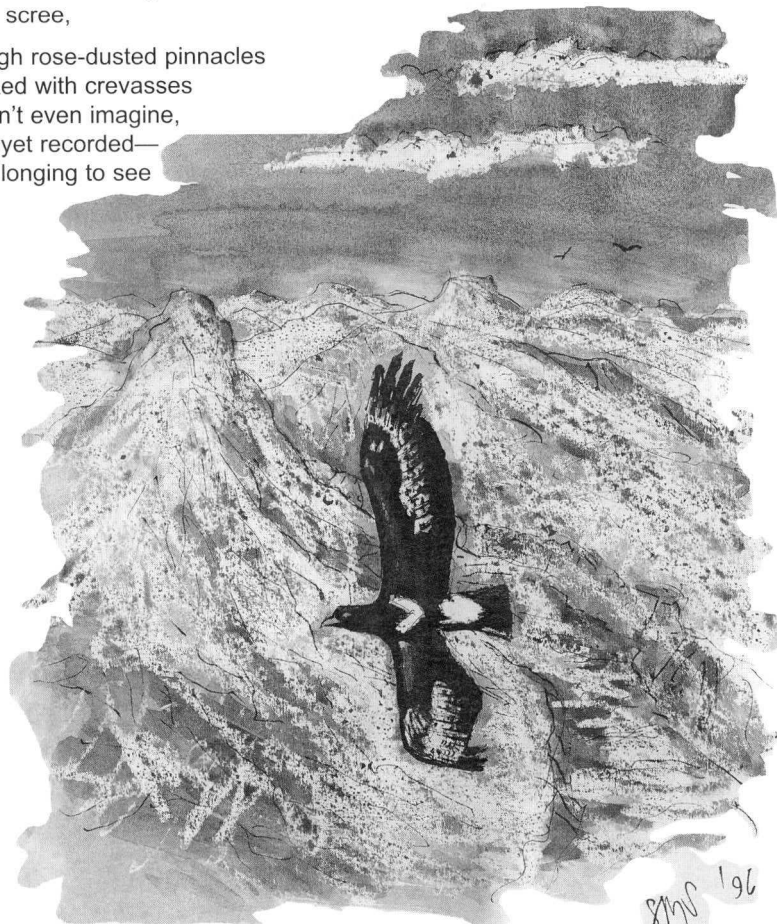
Peckham G. (1996) New Routes in the Natal Drakensberg J. Mountain Club of S.A. (99), 132 - 139.

Griffin M. (1961) Izikhova J. Mountain Club of S.A. (64), 66 - 67.

IN THE HEART OF EACH STONE

In the heart of each stone is a mountain,
On the crest of each wave is a sea,
In your deepest dreams of tomorrow
The faces of dead friends are eagles
Lifting you over the scree,

Then soaring through rose-dusted pinnacles
Over glaciers cracked with crevasses
Into heights you can't even imagine,
Towards vistas not yet recorded—
To a world you are longing to see



ROCK CLIMBING AT THE WHITE UMFOLOZI RIVER

A real “out of Africa” climbing experience!

Gavin Peckham

In a nutshell, what you will find at the White Umfolozi is a selection of over a hundred routes on superb rock. As a bonus, it is a wilderness area that will delight any nature lover. If you are interested, read on.

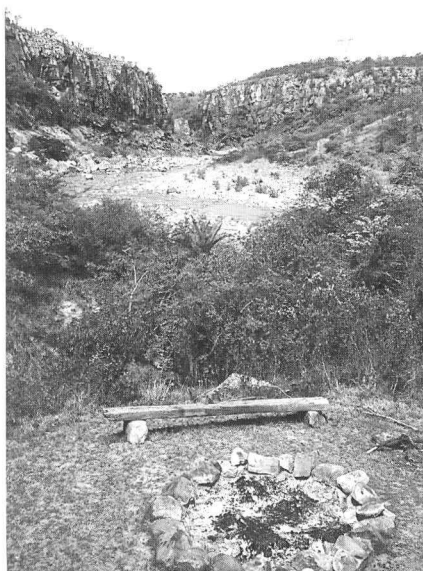
Location, Access and Accommodation

The White Umfolozi crags are situated in the heart of Zululand, about midway between Melmoth and Vryheid. More specifically, they are located about one kilometre downstream from the bridge where the R34 crosses the White Umfolozi River. Accommodation is available at the nearby Matatane Campsite or at a very rustic hut on the banks of the river. The hut provides an ideal base for climbers and has a magnificent view straight down the river onto the Power Wall, a mere 500 m. away.

The turn-off from the R34 to the Matatane Campsite is well sign-posted and is about one kilometre north of the bridge over the White Umfolozi River. The campsite is about half a kilometre from the turn-off, along a reasonably good gravel road. The road to the riverside hut turns off the R34 directly opposite the Matatane turn-off. It is necessary to cross a cattle grid (with care) to gain access to this road. Once across the grid, follow the gravel road for exactly one kilometre to a T-junction. Turn right, then after about 200 m., just before an old abandoned house, take the track that leads off to the right and follow it for just more than a kilometre down the hill towards the river. The road to the hut turns off sharply to the left about 100 m. before you get to an old low-level bridge across the river. **WARNING:** This gravel road becomes very steep and rough as it approaches the river, but with some care it may be negotiated by any normal family sedan.

Accommodation at either venue currently costs R20 per person per night. There is no facility other than cold running water and a toilet. The water is of dubious quality, and it may be best to bring your own drinking water. Fees are usually paid to the caretaker, Mkhize, who stays in a hut adjacent to the Matatane Campsite. Firewood is usually available from Mkhize at R10 a pile - the size of a pile varies! The

craggs are on private land. Before climbing at this venue, permission should be obtained from the owner, Mr. Gerrit Greef at 03545-2332 (W), or from the caretaker. Failure to do so may result in prosecution.



Looking toward the Power Wall -
Photo: Gavin Peckham

Flora and Fauna

Apart from its pure scenic splendour, the valley contains an amazing variety of plants, trees, animals and birds. Orchids and cycads are to be found among the trees and krantzies. Black eagles soar overhead and bald ibis frequent the crags. Dassies, porcupine, otters and a variety of antelope may occasionally be seen. Leopard tracks have been positively identified. Anglers may wish to pass some time in pursuit of catfish or yellowfish. Since rock climbing is the focus of this article, I shall not elaborate further.

The Rock

The crags have resulted from the river carving out a gorge through three billion year old Pongola Quartzites. This ancient rock underlies the various sedimentary strata that constitute the bulk of the KwaZulu - Natal landmass. From the climber's point of view, the rock is of outstanding quality. Towards the upstream end of the crags, which is highest above river level, the rock has a rough texture remarkably similar to that of the Natal Group Sandstones. Towards the downstream end of the crags, which is closer to river level, the rock has a smooth texture which, in some places, is almost soapy. This is possibly due to the polishing effects of wind blown sand and floodwaters. In general, many of the edges which look good from below, turn out to be slopers, but there is also a comforting number of in-cut jugs. In general, many of the cracks, which look as if they will provide good holds and gear, actually pinch out. This makes the holds less secure, and the gear placements more sparse than may have been anticipated when surveying the route from below. Most of the rock is clean. However, a few routes, such as the excellent lines Day-Tripper, Mamba and Rattlesnake Shake are subject to sanding up. It is well worth brushing them if necessary.

The Walls

The accompanying sketch (Fig. 1) shows the location of the various walls and a few of the better routes. The Warrior Wall and the Friction Wall are at river level, but the Power Wall and the Bits & Pieces Wall both lie above huge sloping bands of rock, well above the level of the river. The Power Wall was originally known as the Kua Wall. No one seemed sure how to pronounce this name and most climbers now call this the Power Wall, with obvious reference to the overhead power lines. The Frab and Slicktion Wall has also suffered a name change. The spoonerism proved too much of a tongue twister and the wall is now known simply as the Friction Wall. Most of the established routes are to be found on the Power and Warrior Walls. As a result it is best to approach the crags by crossing the river on the old, low-level bridge near the hut and then walking down the south (true right) bank of the river. In order to reach the other walls from there, it will be necessary to cross the river. Attempting to do this in summer, when the river is flowing strongly, may be hazardous. In winter the water level is usually very low, and crossing the river in the vicinity of the rapids should barely wet your ankles.

The Routes

General information and detailed route directions may be found on the S.A. Mountain Network web site <http://mountain.org.za>. At this site, under the heading "Climbing", click on "Select Area", scroll down to "KwaZulu/Natal" and then click on "White Umfolozi". If all else fails

A – Umfolozi River

B – Power lines

C – Bits & Pieces Wall

D – Friction Wall

E – Power Wall

F – Warrior Wall

1. Dad's Army (14) ****

2. Sands Of Time (15) ***

3. Batman (17) ***

4. Purple People Eater (21) ****

5. Mamba (13) ****

6. Day Tripper (17) ****

7. The Powers That Be (19) ****

8. Solar Power (20) ***

9. The Lorax (16) ****

10. God's Great Banana Skin (24) ****

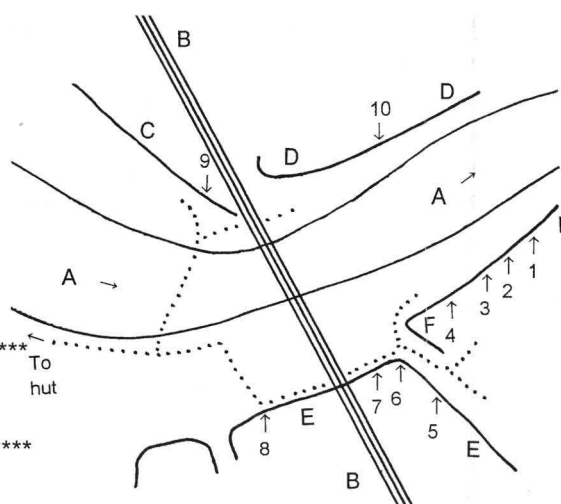


Fig 1: Location of the various walls and climbs at the White Umfolozi River

you can get a copy of the information, route directions and maps (about 30 pages of it), from the writer at P.O. Box 593, Empangeni 3880. If you resort to this desperate measure, then please send R30 to cover the photocopying, postage and inconvenience.

Over a hundred routes have currently been opened. They range in



"Day Tripper" (17), Power Wall - Photo: Gavin Peckham

grade from 9 to 26 and in length from 8 m. to 45 m. The starts of many routes have been marked with tiny, white arrows that are a great help to climbers who are new to the venue. The majority of the routes require traditional protection, but there are also several bolted lines, especially in the harder grades. There are good belay points at the top of most routes, the major-

ity of which can be top-roped. The adventurous climber will find that there is plenty of potential for new routes.

Temperature Considerations

Winter is the best time to climb at the White Umfolozi, as the valley may become uncomfortably hot during the summer months. Fortunately, the aspects of the various walls are such that there is always some climbing available in the shade, even if you have to cross the river to get to it. There is a shady, park-like area at the top of the gully between the Warrior and Power Walls. This provides an ideal lunch spot and a refuge from the heat. There are large sandbanks at the base of the Warrior and Friction Walls. These may be pleasant on mild days, but you can really bake here in mid summer. When climbing on either of these walls, a rope bag, towel, or something to keep your ropes out of the sand, is advisable.

In Conclusion

For a real "out of Africa" climbing experience, a trip to the White Umfolozi provides some excellent crags in a superb setting.

THE GREAT SOLO ASCENT: MCLEOD'S VARIATION ON THE SENTINEL

Gavin Peckham

It was autumn on top of the Amphitheatre. Rodney Owen, his wife Barbara and I had set off early one morning to try and find a new route up the escarpment face of the Inner Tower. A 'big epic' ensued, but that is another story. With our mission unaccomplished we retreated dismally northwards, back towards the chain ladder with an ominous storm threatening all the way.

Somewhere near the Tugela River Rodney decided that we should pitch tent and spend the night on the escarpment. Being the 'crowd' part of 'two's company' I decided to get off the escarpment and back to the Sentinel car park before the storm broke. By 1600 hours I was passing the base of the standard route on the Sentinel. I had previously climbed a couple of routes on the Sentinel, but had never completed McLeod's Variation.

Suddenly the clouds parted and the weather seemed temporarily much less threatening. The sun's brief appearance inspired me to consider an attempt on McLeod's route. I concealed my pack and took only a rope in order to abseil back down the first pitch. Being a climber of very modest ability, and being acutely aware of the dangers of climbing alone, I made the first few moves with extreme caution, determined to turn back the moment I felt the slightest bit insecure. However, hardly a minute had passed when I found myself at the top of the first pitch. Here I left my rope and scrambled up through minor rock bands and scrub to the base of the second and final pitch.

This pitch consists of a D grade chimney which is wide at the base and tapers towards the top where it is blocked by a chockstone. Everything started off well but became progressively more difficult the higher I climbed. By the time I reached the chockstone things were getting fairly tricky. I could rest just below the chockstone by jamming one leg between the two sides of the chimney. Here I pondered the next move.

There were some tempting cracks on the wall to the right, but in order to reach them it would be necessary to stand up straight and reach out to my full length. I became totally fixated on reaching these

cracks. It soon became apparent that this was not as easy as it seemed because there was no foothold, not even an adequate smear. After releasing the leg jam, the further I stood up the closer my feet came to slipping off the sheer rock wall. This would have resulted in an immediate plummet to the bottom of the pitch. Time and time again I tried to reach the tempting cracks. I was tiring rapidly and considered descending. This looked just as risky. Wild thoughts began to go through my mind. Desperation began to set in.

As I settled back on my leg jam for the umpteenth time I bumped my head on the chockstone above. To try and take some of the pressure off my knee I reached up to steady myself on the chockstone when ... lo and behold ... my hand sank straight into a substantial jug. One big heave and I was on top, sweat dripping and adrenaline pumping.

It was barely a few steps to the summit cairn where I sank to the ground and inscribed the summit book, "96/05/04 G Peckham McLeod's Variation". And then, in one of those moments of madness that are inexplicable, I added the word "solo". The descent down the standard route was uneventful. I spent a comfortable night in the car park whilst Rodney and Barbara survived the buffeting of a tremendous storm on the escarpment. By mid-morning the next day we all were on our ways home. And there the story should have ended, but it did not.

Some time passed; more than a year in fact. My 'daring' ascent of McLeod's Variation had become no more than a dim memory. We were out at the crags one day when the chickens came home to roost. The conversation had turned to the 'Berg in general, and to routes on the Sentinel in particular. In response to a query I mentioned that I had climbed McLeod's Variation. There was a chortle from a climber known to his friends as 'Tight Rope'. "Yes," he said, "we know. We saw the account of your 'Great Solo Ascent' in the summit book." There was a sudden, sinking, feeling in the pit of my stomach. "Yes, and all the associated comments," he added.

It turned out that my foolish comment, "solo" had quite predictably inspired a whole succession of snide remarks from subsequent climbers. These apparently range from the first, and very discreet, "ooooOOOH!", through a less subtle comment about the "cutting edge of climbing" to a crude "My f***!!!".

I have bought a bottle of Tippetex, and a return trip to the Sentinel is now a high priority.

New Routes

Natal Drakensberg

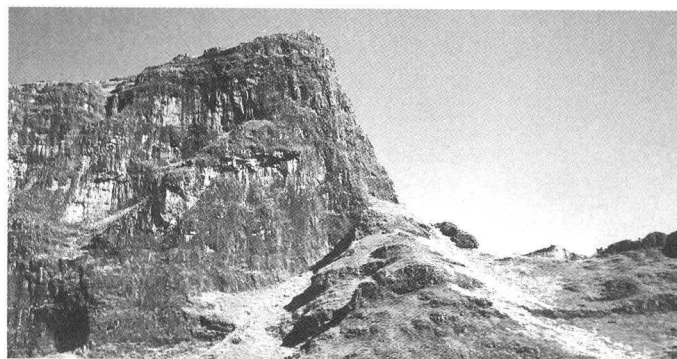
Little Saddle

Gavin Peckham

South Peak, Frontal Route, F2

Map reference: Map #2, AM:55; peak height: 3073m

The Saddle is formed by two imposing buttresses linked by a kilometre-long wall of sheer basalt. This well-known and impressive formation dominates the Ntonjelane valley in the Mnweni area of the Natal Drakensberg. A few kilometres south of Organ Pipes Pass is an almost identical, but somewhat smaller formation known as the Little Saddle. There are several routes on the Saddle, but the Little Saddle was unclimbed by any frontal route until its South Peak was recently climbed. This new route is clearly visible as a striking profile against the skyline when looking south from Organ Pipes Pass in the vicinity of the old fire lookout hut.



South Peak of the Little Saddle as seen from the base of the Sugar loaf. The route runs more or less up the right skyline.

Approach: Walk up Organ Pipes Pass and then head south to the top of the route. Four abseils from the top should reach the bottom of the route. There is a good ab block at the top, but since we did not abseil down the route ourselves, we cannot be certain that suitable ab points will be found lower down. Anyone trying this approach should take prussik loops and pegs.

Alternatively, the route may be approached from below by walking up the long grass ridge that leads up to the peak from Schoongezicht Cave in the upper Didima (Ndedema) valley. This ridge ends in a series of rocky knolls that guard the approach to the base of the peak. The knolls are probably best bypassed on the north side. This will probably require some C or D grade scrambling. Bypassing the knolls on the south side requires finding a way through a complex series of very steep rock and grass bands.

Note: We cannot comment first-hand on these possible approaches as we had the great fortune to be the beneficiaries of a free helicopter ride to the base of the peak. Lest this confession should elicit howls of anguish, we wish to make it known that we have accumulated a significant list of other helicopter or plane assisted ascents in the 'Berg and that some very well known names are involved!

From the topmost knoll, walk along a horizontal ridge towards the peak. Scramble up a short grass gully to reach the highest grass ledge at the base of the peak. Start on the far right hand side of this grass ledge.

1. 45m E: Climb more-or-less straight up on mixed rock and grass following the line of least resistance until you get to a narrow, sloping grass ledge. A steep, grassy chute about 20 m long, leads straight up from this grass ledge. The only belay to be found was a couple of cracks under a somewhat suspect looking boulder in the middle of the steep grass ledge and a couple of metres to the left of the base of the grassy chute.

2. 40m F2: Climb the steep, grassy chute sticking mainly to the rock on the right-hand edge. From the top of the chute move up diagonally left to reach a broad, but steep grass ledge. Gear placements for a belay will be found high up in the rock at the back of the grass ledge.

3. 40m F1: Start just left of the belay and scramble up a steep, narrow grass ramp that rises diagonally to the right. At the top of the ramp, move up diagonally left, to reach the left-hand side of a large recess in the rock. There is a fixed peg at this point. Move diagonally up to the right, across the left face of the recess, heading for the crack at the top. Exit the recess via the crack onto a steep grass ledge. Belay in a small cubbyhole where it is possible to sit in a very well braced position. A sling around two large but slightly loose boulders in the cubbyhole, provides some extra security to the belay. Just left of the cubbyhole is flat area at the base of the rock. Climbers following the leader can wait safely here whilst the next pitch is climbed.

4. *30m F2*: From the right of the cubbyhole, scramble up diagonally right for about 5m to reach a 2m flake leaning against the base of a short vertical wall. Climb up the flake and then directly up the short wall above. From here, climb up diagonally left on easy rock for about 15m to an excellent, airy stance formed by three small, stepped rock ledges with good cracks for a textbook belay.

5. *30m F1*: Clip a shaky fixed peg about 2m above and just left of the belay, then move out delicately to the left, around a very exposed corner. From here move up diagonally left for a couple of metres to reach easier ground and then scramble to the summit.

Time: 5 hours climbing.

Comments: On all pitches the protection is good and adequate without being abundant. The amount of grass on the lower pitches detracts somewhat from the appeal of the line; however, this improves significantly higher up. Regarding the somewhat lengthy time taken to open this climb, we quote Peter Angus-Leppan who said, "... much of the time was spent on route finding - and on one of the most pressing problems of Drakensberg rock climbing - sound belays."

First Ascent: Gavin Peckham, Bruce Sobey and Richard Groenewegen, 29 August 1999.

South Ifidi Pinnacle Gendarme: F3/A1

Gavin Peckham

Map reference: Map #1, L28

The South Ifidi Pinnacle is a popular beginner's route in the 'Berg. No one who has climbed this pinnacle can fail to be impressed by the free-standing, needle-like gendarme adjacent to the south face of the Pinnacle. This gendarme has attracted the attention of several unsuccessful parties. Many years ago Colin Shuttleworth climbed to within 10m of the top and was able to lasso a block on the summit. He was tempted to climb this rope but the ethics prevailing at the time regarded this type of ascent as unacceptable, so Colin and his party retreated with dignity. On a recent trip to Ifidi, we cast dignity to the winds and forced a way to the summit.

From the escarpment, scramble down the gully directly opposite the South Ifidi Pinnacle. About halfway down the gully becomes very steep. From this point you can either abseil further or scramble about 10m diagonally down to the right (facing down the gully) to reach a fixed peg. Either way, a fixed rope should be left to facilitate the return trip. Walk across to the nek between the gendarme and the escarpment.

1. *25m D*: From the highest point on the nek, walk a few metres to the

left and start up a right-tending recess. Follow the line of least resistance, tending left on mixed rock and grass, to reach a belay on a grassy shoulder at the base of the final rock pillar. The belay is at the base of a short, shallow chimney or recess with a chockstone about 3m up.

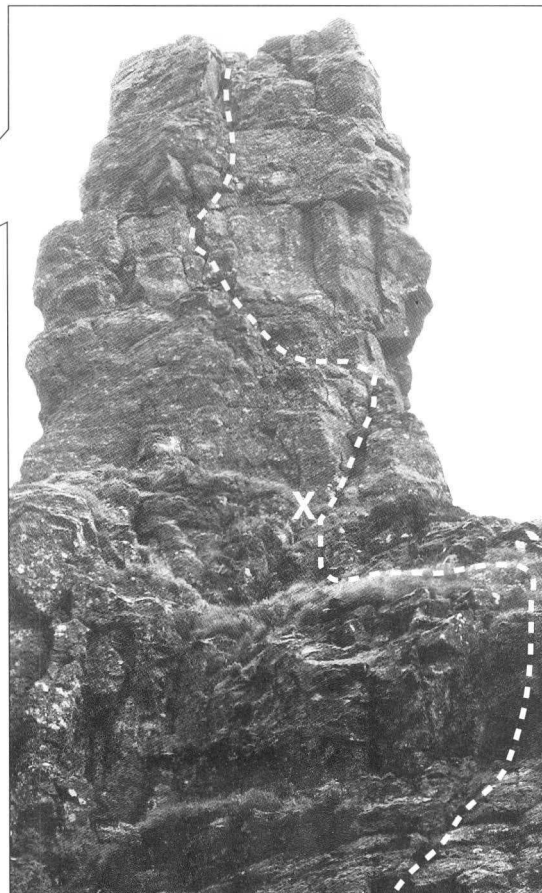
2. 30m F3/A1: Climb the chimney/recess to just above the chockstone. Traverse left for about 4m and then climb diagonally up to the left for about 6m to a tiny stance located about 3m left of an old peg. Layback straight up a short recess to reach a position under a small roof/overlap. There is another old peg a couple of metres off to the right and just below the only tuft of grass on the pitch. Reach across and clip a sling into the peg. Step across into the sling to gain access to the recess above. Climb straight up to the recess to the top. Belay points can be found in a crack just over the far (north) edge of the summit.

Descent: A 5 m loop of ab cord around the escarpment side of the summit is required. From this, a 45m abseil reaches straight down to the nek.

First Ascent: Gavin Peckham and Richard Knott, 21 November 1999



The South Ifidi Pinnacle Gendarme.
The route starts from the little nek
on the right.



Sugar Loaf: E

Gavin Peckham

Map reference: Map #2, AN:56; Peak height 2723m

The Sugar Loaf is a small but prominent peak in the Eastman's Fork area of the upper Didima valley. Despite the fact that the peak is highly visible, well-known, and easily accessible, no previous ascents have been recorded. The MCSA Journal of 1935, page 76, and Pat Irwin's The Natal Drakensberg, 2nd edition, page E5, do make reference to previous ascents of the Sugar Loaf. It is, however, clear from these articles that they are actually referring to the adjacent buttress attached to the escarpment (2949m) and not to the free-stander (2723m) in front of and below it. It is this free-stander that is now known as the Sugar Loaf.

Walk up the narrow, grassy ridge leading up to the Sugar Loaf. This ridge is the one adjacent to the south side of the strong stream that runs down between the South Peak of the Little Saddle and the Sugar Loaf. There are several horizontal steps on this ridge that make convenient campsites. Water is always available in the stream mentioned above. Follow the ridge up to within about 50m of the start of the north-east arête of the Sugar Loaf and then traverse off to the right and across the grass slopes below the sheer north face. This traverse gives access to an easy grass gully that leads up to the nek between the Sugar Loaf and the adjacent buttress on the escarpment.

From the nek a groove leads up into a cleft in the peak. Climb the excellent rock just to the right of the groove for about 10m (D). Avoid some loose rocks near the top of the groove by moving a couple of metres to the right, then up, then back left to reach a grassy step below a chockstone in the cleft. The chockstone is clearly visible from the nek. Straddle up to gain the top of the chockstone (3m E) and then scramble up into the gully behind it and belay. Continue up the gully, climbing three short rock steps (D), then scramble up a grassy chute and walk across to the summit.

Descent: Scramble down the grassy chute then move out left (facing out) onto the rock above the highest rock step in the gully. Here there is a good block from which a 45m abseil reaches the nek.

First Ascent: Gavin Peckham and Tony van Tonder, 19 September 1999

A Hair-raising Experience on the Inner Mnweni Pinnacle

ANTHONY VAN TONDER

On 14 November 1998, Gavin Peckham and I set out to climb the Inner Mnweni Pinnacle (3 096m), a spectacular rock spire at the top of a very steep gully directly opposite Mnweni Pass, in the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg.

Driving up early in the morning, we found a new causeway over the Thonyelana River (Ntonjelana River on the old Slingsby maps) and drove further up the Mnweni Valley until the track became impassable, parking at a Zulu kraal. From there we were able to walk to the bottom of Mnweni Pass in one very long, hot and tiring day, our packs heavy with climbing gear. Although this area is marked as Chichi Bush Camp on the map, there is nowhere flat to camp here, the terrain being very steep. Eventually we found a patch of flat gravel between some boulders in the Mnweni streambed, just big enough to accommodate us.

As we sat drinking tea, our backs against the boulders, we gazed up the gully above us to the Mnweni Pinnacle's impressive silhouette against the evening sky. The weather was warm and clear and we slept in the open. This saved us time in the morning, by not having to pack up a tent.

After carefully concealing our stuff under some boulders we set off at 5 am with our daypack and climbing gear. I insisted on bringing my camera, despite my companion's grumbling about its size and weight in the daypack. Moving up the boulder-choked gully at first, then up the adjacent steep grass slopes, often fighting our way through dense chichi bush, it took us three hours of strenuous scrambling to reach the nek between the Inner and Outer Mnweni pinnacles.

From the nek there were nine pitches of rock climbing to the summit. Starting shortly after 8 am, we alternated leads. The first four pitches ascended a 150m chimney to a small nek between the main pinnacle and a gendarme on the left. Two more pitches angled up diagonally right across some very steep and unprotected grass sections interspersed with broken rock, to a stance with some old pitons on a long narrow grassy ledge. The seventh pitch traversed out to the right along this ledge for about 60m, crossing a few metres of very exposed, unprotected, exfoliating rock slab about halfway along. From the end of this ledge the eighth pitch ascended a difficult chimney and we topped out of the ninth pitch on to the summit at about 3 pm, ten hours after leaving camp.

The summit of the Inner Mnweni Pinnacle is high enough to look down on to the nearby escarpment and we had spectacular views across the Mnweni cutback towards Mnweni Pass, Ledger's Cave and Mponjwane Peak. While we had been climbing, stormclouds had gathered and by the time we reached the summit, there were several very active thunderstorms in the vicinity. Small hailstones

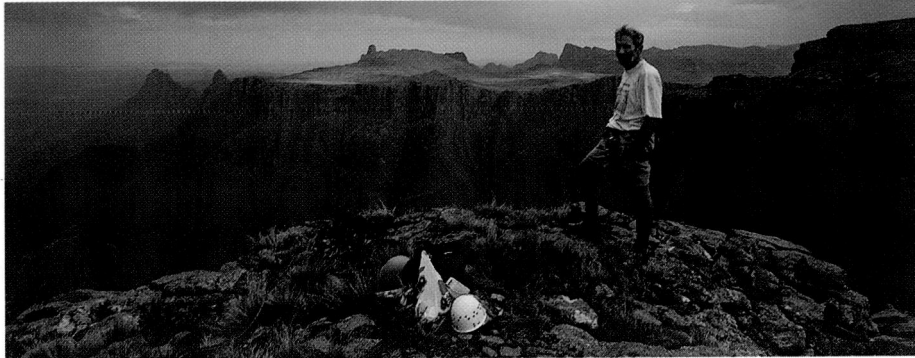
Starting the descent of the Inner Mnweni Pinnacle Gendarme. In the foreground is Mnweni Pass and behind centre is Mponjwane Peak. ANTHONY VAN TONDER.

pelted us. Thunder rumbled continuously. Sheet lightning flashed repeatedly across the sky and forked lightning struck the peaks around us every few seconds. I suddenly became aware that the hairs on my arms were lifting with static electricity, and watched amazed as they rose and fell in synchrony with the lightning flashes. A few seconds later a particularly vigorous flash tugged unmistakably at the hairs on my head. I saw by the shocked look on Gavin's face, that he had felt it too. We were standing on top of a giant electrode. 'Let's get out of here quickly!' we exclaimed (expletives paraphrased).

Abandoning our intended summit lunch, we hastily took photographs and packed up our gear. As this peak is seldom climbed we could see no trace of abseil points. The route description had not given recommendations for the descent. Rather than reversing our ascent, which had involved a long traverse around the side of the peak, we decided that the quickest and most obvious way down would be to abseil straight to the nek next to the gendarme at the top of the fourth pitch. Should the ropes not reach the nek, we hoped to find an intermediate ledge on the way down. We scrambled down off the summit on to a steep grass shoulder where we found a suitable rock to secure a loop of abseil cord, threaded our pair of joined and doubled-over 50m ropes, and tossed them down. Although we could see the top of the gendarme, the nek would only come into view after we started to descend the vertical rock face below the grass shoulder on which we stood. Gavin went down first, while I waited with the daypack on my back, hoping that if lightning struck the summit it would not affect me here.

After what seemed like an age, the ropes went slack and hearing Gavin's distant shouts, faint and indistinct above the noise of the storms, I concluded that he was calling me down. As I descended the rock face, I could see neither Gavin nor the ends of the ropes below me as they were concealed below a slightly overhanging bulge. When I arrived at the bottom of our ropes, which were knotted together to prevent us abseiling right off the ends, to my surprise I found Gavin clinging to handholds and standing on a sloping rail on the rock face with no real ledge in sight. He had been forced to detach himself from the ropes to let me come down. His only protection was provided by clipping his harness to a loop of abseil cord placed around a very dubious-looking fist-sized lump of rock, that was too small and flat to call a bollard. The loop would only remain in place if a direct downward pull were maintained. I stood on the rail a metre to Gavin's left and could not clip into the loop, as the direction of pull would be wrong. His position gave me the heeby-jeebies so I immediately passed the rope ends to him so that he could re-clip himself on to the ropes with me. The nek was about 35m further below us.

Gavin noted that we were now in a sticky situation (paraphrased again). I remonstrated with him for bringing me down here instead of prussiking back up the ropes to try another route. His reply was that he had not called me down but had actually been trying to inform me of the situation. Now that we were both down here, it would be a slow tedious process for the two of us to prussik back up the full length of the ropes to the top, one after the other; besides which the lightning up there was terrifying. However, unless we could first establish a safe anchor point, we would not be able to pull our ropes down and proceed with the descent. The hammer and pitons were inside the daypack. Dropping the daypack



On the Inner Mnweni Pinnacle summit. ANTHONY VAN TONDER.

would have been disastrous, so we first clipped it to the ropes with a sling, then, while precariously clinging to the cliff face, I awkwardly removed it from my back. We held on to the rock, cautiously avoiding both hanging on the ropes at the same time, as we feared that our combined weight might overload the thin loop of abseil cord at the top.

Having carefully extracted the hammer and pitons we searched the rock in front of us for a crack. Gavin eventually scratched away some dirt to expose a small crack about a metre above his 'bollard'. We were both weary and took great care not to fumble and drop the hammer or pitons as I passed them to him. The crack was very shallow and would accept only half the blade of a short piton, so to reduce leverage Gavin tied the abseil cord around the blade flush against the rock, instead of using the eye. The fact that the crack was vertical also meant that there was more risk of the piton being dislodged when loaded than if it had been horizontal. We now attached ourselves to the piton's ab-cord with slings, then Gavin tested it by pulling on it with all his weight, while still secured by the ropes. The piton held. We dared not test it with our combined weight in case it popped out dropping us both onto the ropes simultaneously. We carefully adjusted the two loops of abseil cord on the piton and the 'bollard' so that the load would be shared between them when we abseiled. We were acutely aware of our fatigue. We both concentrated intently on what we were doing, watching each other, talking and thinking aloud, trying to anticipate any disastrous errors we might make before they occurred, carefully sorting through our slings, abseil cord and ropes to avoid crossing, tangling or dropping them.

Now came the moment of truth. We would have to detach from the ropes and pull them down. What if the ropes jammed? The rock above us was unclimbable. We would be stuck here for days before rescuers would come looking for us. (To prussik up one side of a jammed pair of ropes would be fatal if they suddenly came unstuck.)

We detached ourselves from the paired ropes, and each held on to an end, realising that as the elastic ropes had been stretched under our weight they might retract up out of our reach if we let them go. We were now fully dependent on the piton for our protection. To avoid dropping the ropes when they came down, I tied my end to my harness, then began pulling the rope down. Gavin held

on to his end, not letting it retract until we were sure that the ropes would move. The first few metres that I pulled down merely took up rope stretch, as friction prevented the ropes from sliding over the rock and through the loop of abseil cord above. I hauled strenuously until eventually Gavin felt his end pulling. We stared at each other for a few seconds, knowing that when he released it we would no longer have the option of climbing back up ... then he let go.

Gavin helped me now and we continued hauling, hand over hand, trying to maintain momentum, panting with exertion, mentally pleading with the ropes not to jam. My anxiety slowly abated as each arm-length came down. When we had accumulated more rope I consoled myself with the thought that if they jammed now, we could cut off enough to get down the mountain, albeit with difficulty. Eventually, to our great relief the last of the rope dropped down without mishap. After carefully threading the ropes through the prepared loops, first Gavin then I abseiled as delicately as possible from our two dubious anchors down to the nek next to the gendarme.

We were safe now, but we had been in a very precarious position. Many things could have gone wrong. We had kept our wits about us and we had been lucky. However it was not until we had completed the remaining four long abseils down to *terra firma* on the nek between the Inner and Outer pinnacles that I gave vent to my relief by jumping up and down and shouting, 'I'm alive! I'm alive!' It was 6 pm.

We hurried down the mountain in fading light, sticking to the steep grass and bush-covered slopes to the right of the gully. Darkness soon overtook us, there was no moon and we struggled to find our way by torchlight through the dense scratchy chichi bush. We eventually decided to move left into the gully but the terrain became steeper and steeper as we approached it. We were forced to climb down backwards through the thick bushes grasping their stems for balance. Suddenly I found my feet waving around in space as the ground in the darkness beneath me had dropped away vertically. The bushes that I was clutching at were tearing out of the ground. I wriggled back up, with dirt and twigs going down my shirt. It was thoroughly unpleasant. Fortunately, we then found a large secure boulder, from which we could abseil. I went first, pushing my way down through the bushes into the darkness, disentangling the ropes from the snagging branches as I went. I was relieved to reach the gully's steep boulder-strewn floor before the rope ran out. From there it was a simple but tiring process to clamber down the boulders to the bottom of the gully.

About halfway down I heard muffled thumps and grunts of pain behind me. I turned around to look for Gavin, but could not see him. That is, I could not see his torch, as its batteries had gone flat, and he was tripping, stumbling, and muttering in the dark. My camera is unusual in that it uses four penlight batteries, which were exactly what Gavin needed for his torch. After making him promise never to grumble about my camera again, I gave him the batteries. We got back to our campsite at 9 pm, 16 hours after leaving it.

A little later, we were sitting comfortably with our backs against the warm boulders, sipping tea and discussing the climb. We decided that a lesson we had learnt that day was that if there is any doubt about the line of descent, one should always descend by the route that one has climbed. This way one will not abseil into situations that one cannot climb out of if the ropes should jam.

Silvermine sunset, Cape Peninsula. MALCOLM GOWANS.

Rock Climbing at Morgan Bay

Gavin Peckham

In Brief

The delightful Eastern Cape resort of Morgan Bay is home to the only established sea cliff climbing in southern Africa. There are currently over eighty routes available at this unique venue.

Location: Morgan Bay is situated about 50 km north east of East London and about 5 km south of the Kei River mouth. After turning off the N2 there is about 40 km of good gravel road to negotiate before reaching the town. The turn-offs to Kei Mouth and then to Morgan Bay are well sign-posted and any respectable road map will show you how to get there.

Accommodation

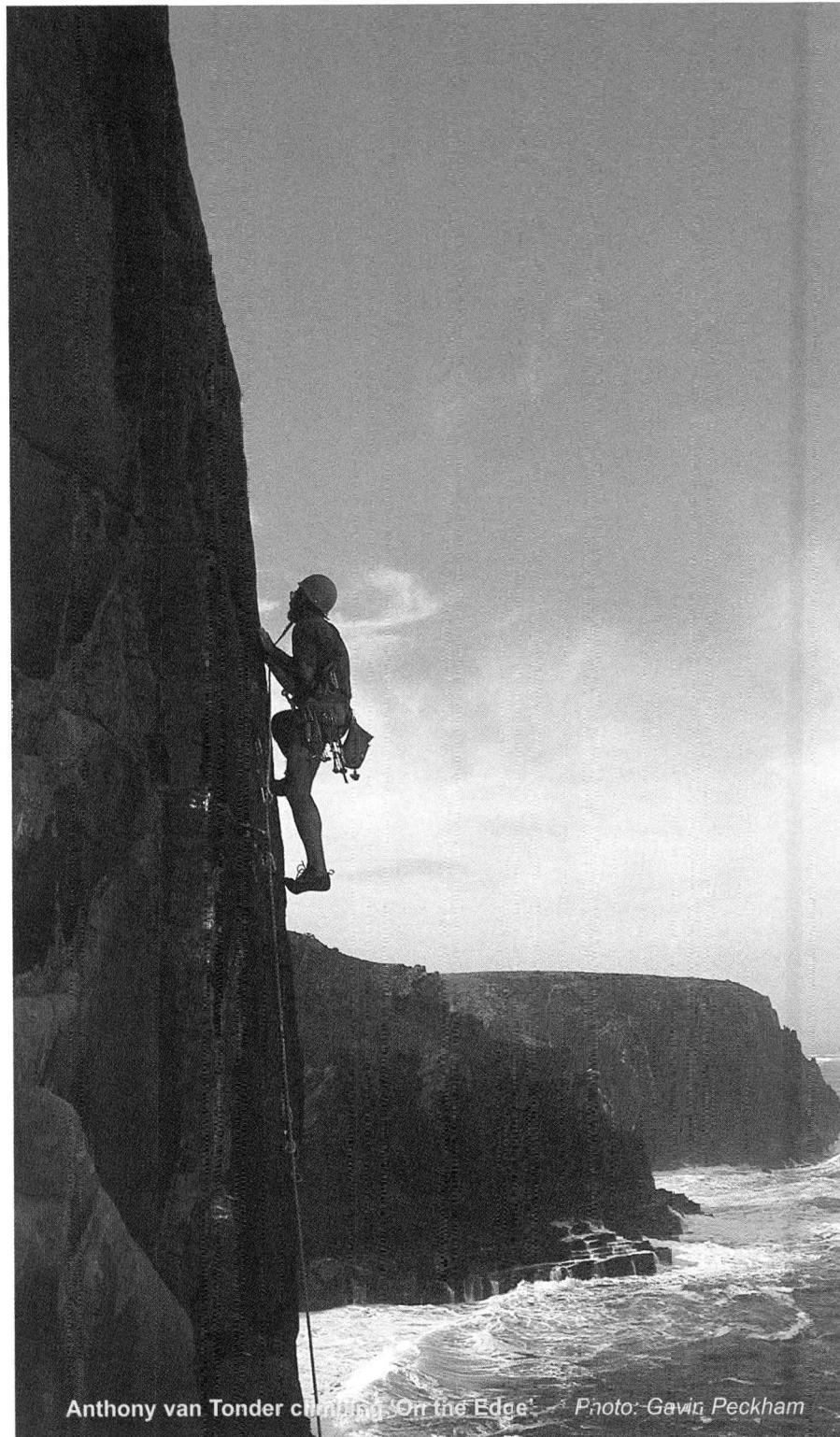
If you turn left at the beachfront T-junction, you will find a campsite on the right within about 50m. This pleasant campsite on the banks of the Inchara Lagoon has all the usual facilities but tends to be fairly crowded in season. Alternatively, you can turn right at the beachfront T-junction and follow the road to the crags, described below. When you get to the gate across the road, carry straight on until you wind downhill to the Double Mouth campsite, which is about 4 km from the village. This is a much more secluded site within 50 m of the beach and very close to another lagoon. If you are not keen to camp then the Morgan Bay Hotel will treat you like a king. You can buy petrol and most basic provisions in the village. Further information may be obtained from Morgan Bay's excellent website at: www.morganbay.co.za

Name

As a matter of interest, most current maps indicate the name of the venue as Morgan's Bay. The town was originally known as Morgan Bay (without the 's') and there is a strong movement among the local population to restore the 'proper' name. This has resulted in a few anomalies such as the Morgan's Bay Bottle Store and the adjacent Morgan Bay Hotel !

Access

To reach the crags from the town, turn right at the beachfront T-junction and follow the road past the Morgan Bay Hotel and then across a small concrete bridge. Immediately after the bridge the road swings sharply left and then right as it winds up a steep hill. The road then



Anthony van Tonder climbing 'On the Edge' Photo: Gavin Peckham

Africa



Robert 'Bugs' Sprouse climbing 'Once in a Lifetime'

Photo: Anthony van Tonder

continues on a fairly level gradient through open grassland with a fence along the seaward (left) side. Keep looking ahead for a gate across the road. Just before this gate there is another road turning off to the right and leading past a large concrete shed. About 200m before reaching the gate / turn-off / shed combination, turn off to the left onto a very vague track at a barbed-wire gate in the roadside fence. Drive about 100m along this track and over a slight rise. Directly ahead of you the land drops away steeply to the bay between the 'Rope' headland on the left and the 'Botha's Krantz' headland on the right. This is a good place to park as the slight rise keeps your vehicle out of view from traffic and pedestrians on the 'main' road. You can drive almost anywhere across the fairly level, open grassland at the top of the sea cliffs if you wish.

The road from the town to the crags, and on to the Double Mouth campsite is rough in patches, especially on the steep uphill just after the small concrete bridge. Picks-ups and mini-busses will have no trouble at all. A normal family sedan will get through without too much difficulty, but you will need to drive carefully and pick the best line through the occasional rough patches.

The land adjacent to the crags is town commonage and the public currently enjoys free access to the crags.

Security

It is a sad sign of the times that it is necessary to mention this! However, the public seems to walk freely through the campsite in town. If you leave your tents unattended whilst climbing during the day, they may be vulnerable to pilfering, although I have had no concrete information that this is the case. At the more isolated Double Mouth campsite your possessions seem to be completely secure except for the vervet monkeys which are quite bold and will help themselves to any food that is not securely packed away.

Whilst climbing, your car should be reasonably secure if you park it out of sight over the rise as suggested above. Backpackers and hikers often pass this way along the cliff-top paths. Their presence is more likely to improve the security of your vehicle rather than the opposite.

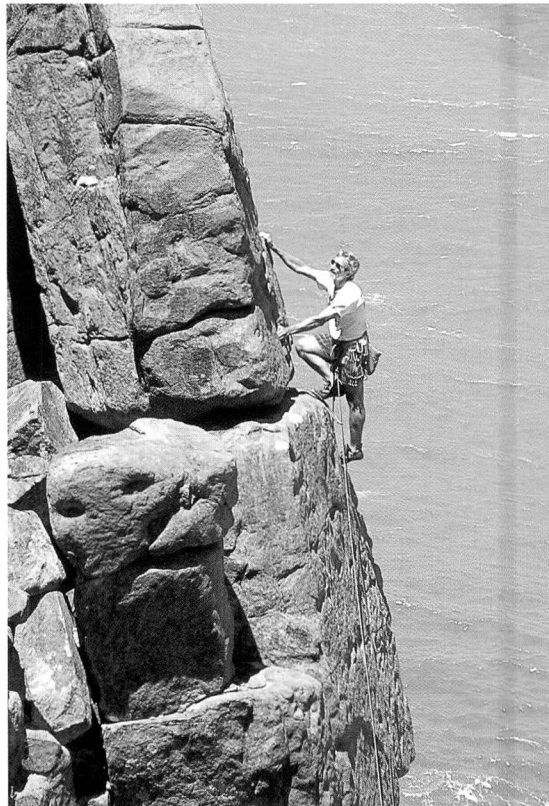
There is cell phone reception in the village as well as in the vicinity of the crags and the Double Mouth campsite.

The climbing

The climbing is on dolerite and is characterised by an abundance of vertical cracks. It is of excellent quality and has a very rough texture. The routes are widely scattered over several faces, pinnacles and buttresses that are located at different levels above the ocean. Most of the routes are vertical or just on-balance. The routes are generally fairly short (about 10-15m) and tend

Anthony van Tonder on 'Flycatcher'

Photo: Gavin Peckham



Africa

to follow crack lines. They range in grade from 11 to 26 with a majority being between grades 17 and 22. All, but two, of the routes are trad lines and most of them can be top-roped if necessary.

There are currently about 80 routes with the potential for many more, especially on the less accessible cliffs down at sea level. The only route descriptions currently accessible to the public are on the MCSA - KZN website at <http://kzn.mcsa.org.za/morgan/mb-menu.html>. These pages are still under development but should provide enough information to keep you climbing for quite some time. Beware of sandbagging - some of the routes are decidedly under graded - especially in the lower grades.

When the wind blows strongly, some faces become damp with sea-spray. This is not as serious as it sounds - many routes have such good friction that they are climbable even when the rock is damp. Even under these conditions, cliffs facing away from the wind usually remain bone dry. Because of the different aspects of the numerous crags, faces and buttresses, you can always find a selection of routes that are dry and/or shady. The weather is more predictable and the rock is generally drier during the winter months.

Although some of the routes are chossy, the majority are good and several are spectacular with a high proportion of 'four star' routes. What really makes the climbing special, however, is the proximity of the sea. To climb with waves crashing into the rocks below you and dolphins frolicking within a stone's throw is an incredibly exhilarating experience. Warnings: Most of the climbs are safely above sea level, but if you plan to tackle routes down at the water's edge, then check the tides carefully and beware the occasional big waves that smash into the cliffs. In some areas, the steep grass slopes that lead down to the cliffs drop straight into the sea - watch your footing carefully at these spots, especially if the grass is damp. Finally, be aware that the noise of the sea may hamper communications between climbers on some routes.

Other attractions

Morgan Bay is an ideal family holiday venue. Whilst you are busy climbing, the rest of the family can indulge in numerous activities such as hiking, bird watching, swimming, snorkelling, canoeing. The area is renowned for the quality of its surf fishing whilst the lagoons are also fairly productive. There is a large game ranch and several other tourist-orientated venues close by. Details of these may be obtained from the reception at the Morgan Bay Hotel, which houses a mass of brochures and information about local activities and attractions. Their pub is a particularly pleasant venue at which to end a hard day's climbing. They also serve excellent food in case you get tired of DIY.

Conclusion

If you want to experience some good climbing, totally different from anything else in southern Africa, then Morgan Bay is well worth a visit.



Sunset from Double Mouth campsite Photo: Anthony van Tonder

Digital on the beach means...

FIRST RECORDED ASCENT OF THE AMPHITHEATRE'S SOUTHERN PINNACLE

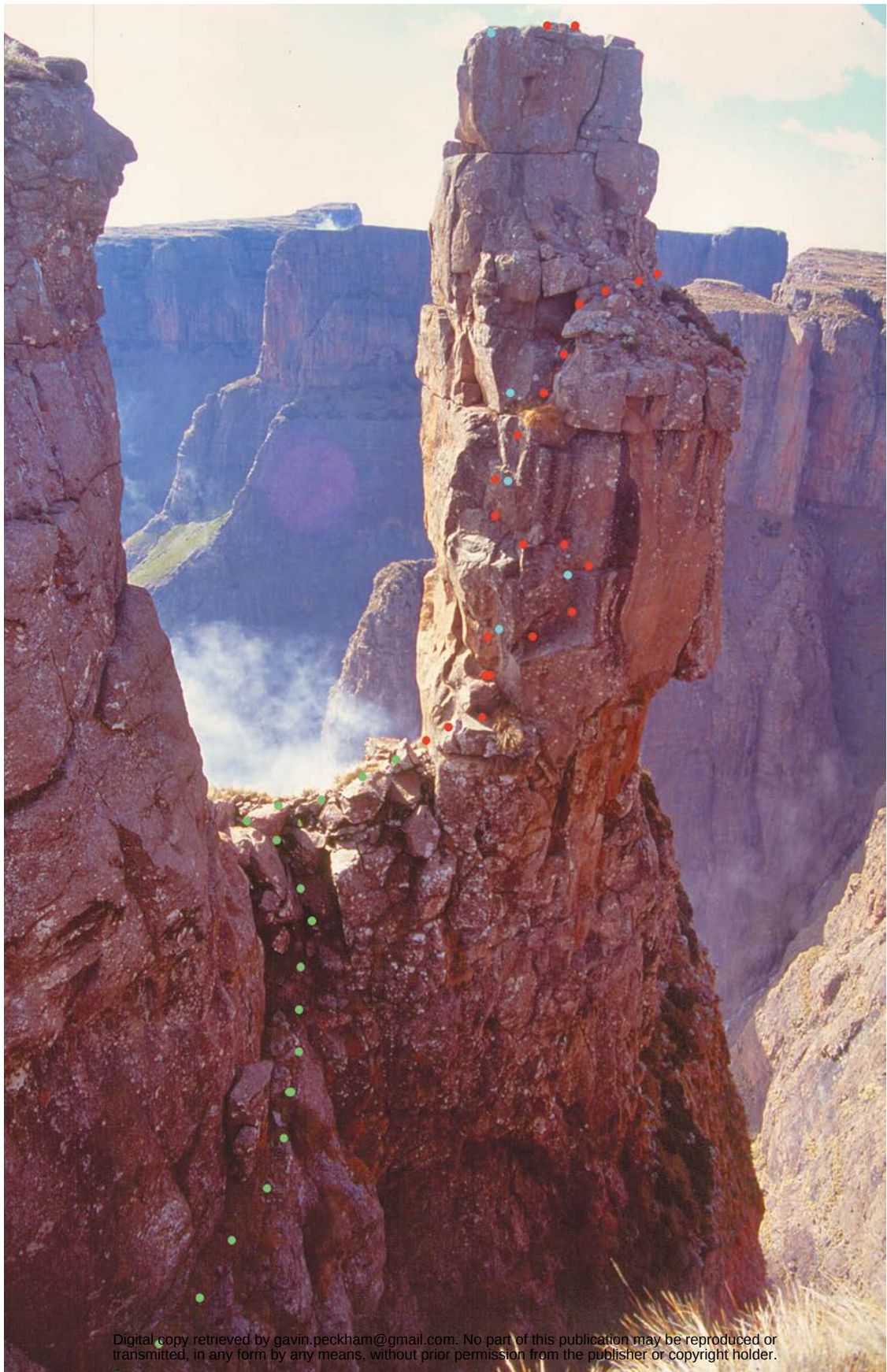
Anthony van Tonder and Gavin Peckham

Some time ago John Hone photographed a free-standing pinnacle near the south-eastern end of the Amphitheatre. He sent the picture to that indefatigable Berg climber Gavin Peckham with a note hinting that it would make a better photograph with a climber on the summit. Gavin's research soon established that this was a previously unclimbed peak. Gavin used this as bait to rope in his climbing buddies, Bruce Sobey and Anthony van Tonder who, being survivors of several previous Berg epics at Peckham's behest, tend to be somewhat recalcitrant these days.

Many months slipped by before a weekend was finally found that suited everyone. On the afternoon of Saturday, 15 May 2004 a party comprising John Hone and James Voortman (both loaded with cameras), the 3 climbers mentioned above (loaded with ropes, climbing gear and a drill) as well as Anthony's young son Roger, arrived at the Witsieshoek car park. They trudged up to the chain ladder, across the top of the Amphitheatre and then camped overnight just beyond the Bilanjil stream.

Early next morning the three would-be first ascensionists viewed the pinnacle from the escarpment edge. Much discussion ensued as the pinnacle was viewed from various vantage points. A number of intimidating difficulties were observed and one member of the party (who shall remain nameless) favoured an immediate retreat to the nearest pub.

It became apparent that they would first have to abseil down to the nek between the escarpment and a wide intervening pinnacle. From there a traverse led around the side of this inner pinnacle to reach another nek between it and the second, more impressive pinnacle that was their goal. Viewed from the escarpment above, the traverse ledge looked horrendous. Apart from the precipitous drop-off below it, the ledge appeared to be extremely narrow, steeply sloping and covered with slippery grass. The nek between the two



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pinnacles appeared to consist of a dangerously loose jumble of delicately balanced blocks, with abysmal drop-offs on either side. The climbing on the lower half of the pinnacle looked difficult and totally unprotected whilst, just below the summit, it appeared necessary to traverse across a sloping ledge of fearfully loose rock.

John and James fiddled disconsolately with their cameras and tripods whilst the climbers wrestled with their indecision. Anthony eventually took the initiative and decided to abseil down to the first nek and investigate the traverse. From there they would at least be able to climb the intervening pinnacle if the outer pinnacle proved to be unreachable. Gavin and Bruce watched from above with little enthusiasm as Anthony descended.

From the inner nek Anthony scrambled down to the right and onto the grassy traverse ledge. This surprised him by being far less intimidating than it had appeared from above. In no time he had completed the traverse and scrambled up to the outer nek. He found this to be much larger and comprised of more stable rock than it had appeared from above. He studied the rock above him. The climb looked feasible provided they could overcome a very difficult move just above the nek. This involved moving up from under an overhanging face by reaching up high to the right for a concealed hold around the corner, then stepping high with the right foot and pulling up awkwardly and strenuously to move around the overhanging arête, to reach a steep ramp above the awesome drop-off on the side.

After some cajoling Bruce was persuaded to come down with the drill so



Amphitheatre pinnacle. ANTHONY VAN TONDER

LEFT: *Amphitheatre pinnacle: approach green; route red; bolts blue.* ANTHONY VAN TONDER

that this move could be protected with a bolt. After the bolt was placed, and yet more cajoling, the still sceptical Peckham descended to the nek, bringing a second rope.

By aiding on the bolt Anthony then managed to climb around the arête and onto the ramp. From there, encumbered by the heavy drill, he decided to proceed one move at a time and see how far he could get ... After friction-climbing up the ramp he placed a second bolt to protect an awkward mantelshelf move. After the mantelshelf a tricky traverse to the left and around the corner brought him back to a position above the nek. From there straightforward climbing took him up the face (placing two more bolts for protection) to the base of a short chimney. Squeezing delicately through the chimney between wedged but suspect blocks, he gained the large sloping ledge of loose rocks and grass. After traversing easily across this to the right he was then able to scramble up to the summit to the delighted cheers of Bruce and Gavin below.

Their triumph was short-lived, however, when Anthony discovered some old ab cord on the summit. Gavin's disbelief, once Anthony had him on belay, propelled him rapidly to the summit, where Bruce joined them soon afterwards. As there was no natural protection whatsoever on the lower half of the pinnacle and as the moves that they had aided on some of the bolts were hard enough, they wondered who could have previously climbed this pinnacle. Adding to the puzzle, the old ab cord was in a recessed position in a crack on the Natal side of the summit, from where it would have been impossible to retrieve the ropes after abseiling down to the nek. Perhaps someone had climbed from below the Amphitheatre, on the side opposite the nek, and retreated the same way. Or had the previous party been dropped off by helicopter?

Anthony placed their last bolt in a convenient position on the summit and then the trio abseiled back down to the nek. After reversing the traverse the escarpment was regained by prussiking up the rope that had been left hanging there.

Unfortunately the photographers were prevented from getting any good shots of the triumphant party on the summit by mist which had closed in at the time.

Gavin has since made a considerable effort to track down the first ascensionists. He put out appeals in local climbing newsletters and e-mail lists and contacted old Berg climbers as far afield as England, Australia, New Zealand and the United States. No one has been able to shed any light on the matter. It seems that their identity will remain forever an enigma.

Route Description: Amphitheatre, Southern Pinnacle

Approach: After being essentially level for much of its length, the edge of the

Amphitheatre begins to rise steadily towards the Inner Tower at its southern end. The Southern Pinnacle is located about halfway along this southern, rising section. There are in fact two connected pinnacles. The first is wide, easily climbed and is connected directly to the escarpment by a broad nek. This in turn is connected by a narrow nek to a second and far more impressive pinnacle, surrounded by spectacular drop-offs on all sides.

Leave a fixed rope, and abseil down to the nek between the escarpment and the wide intervening pinnacle. Scramble down to the right under a huge block and then traverse easily (walk) along the narrow, grassy ledge on the escarpment side of the first pinnacle, step halfway around a block just beyond half way (exposed). Scramble up a recess between large blocks to reach the narrow nek leading to the second pinnacle.

Route: 35m G1/A0 [4 bolts, 1 anchor]

Scramble straight up from the nek to the highest block under the overhanging face (bolt). Reach up to the right and around the slightly overhanging arête for a concealed hold. Pull up awkwardly and strenuously onto a ramp around the corner and above the drop-off on the escarpment side. Aid off the quickdraw if necessary.

Friction-climb the ramp to a bolt, then make an awkward mantelshelf move. This is considerably easier if you step into a long sling clipped to the bolt. From the mantelshelf, traverse left around the corner until back above the nek. Climb up the face past two more bolts to the base of a short chimney.

Squeeze through the chimney between wedged but suspect blocks to gain a large, sloping ledge of loose rocks and grass. Traverse around to the right (anti-clockwise) on the ledge and then scramble up to the summit via the easiest line.

Descent: There is a single bolt on the summit. If you want to back this up you will need a long piece of ab cord. A single ab of about 25m takes you down to the nek. However, it is preferable to continue abseiling down to the end of the traverse ledge that approaches the nek (35m from the summit). Walk back along the ledge to the fixed rope and then prussik back up to the escarpment edge.

Comments: No traditional gear is needed for the climb which is sparsely but adequately protected by the bolts. However, some gear is needed to attach the fixed rope on the escarpment. Except for the ledge near the top, the rock is of superb quality by any standards. There is an excellent-looking line that traverses left across the clean face from the fourth bolt. Should this line be opened it will avoid the chossy ledge at the top.

First recorded ascent: Anthony van Tonder, Gavin Peckham, Bruce Sobey.
16 May 2004

SALUTE THE LEGENDS EVENING

KAREN KOHLER



In the history of the KwaZulu-Natal Section of the Mountain Club of South Africa, 19 November 2005 was a very special evening. That night, 180 people gathered for dinner at Grace College Hall in Hilton to pay tribute to some extraordinary people – men and women who had achieved what many only dream of and, in so doing, have become our ‘legends’. Besides this, it was a reunion and an opportunity for the younger climbers to meet and listen to some of the stories of what mountaineering and climbing in the 1950s was like.

The idea of holding an evening function to salute mountaineering legends took seed high on top of the Drakensberg escarpment when John Hone, Bruce Tomalin and Gavin Peckham started talking about those who had gone before. The idea grew. Mountains are the testing grounds of all mountaineers, but it seemed to these campside fellows that during the 1940s and 1950s truly astonishing feats were performed. In those days equipment was heavy, unreliable and, in many cases, makeshift. Climbers had few footpaths to follow and no route guides up those peaks never before conquered. Even getting to the base of the peaks was a ‘mission’ due to the lack of roads, and many still remember the ox wagons and donkey carts used to ferry people and goods as far as the Little Berg.

In that era, determination, strength, skill and a fierce love of the heights and of the wilds saw peak after peak bow to those male and female legends. George Thomson was regarded as a ‘crazy’ climber for his dogged attack on unclimbed peaks. Brian Godbold put 22 first ascents under his belt, even climbing the Bell with Dave Pullen as a present to himself on his 70th birthday, and was still climbing in Kloof Gorge at 80. Then there was Martin Winter, who climbed 7 major peaks in a mere 12 days – a feat never before achieved and never since repeated. Des Watkins made 13 first ascents, Martin 11, and these two plus Lorna Peirson, Gillian Earle and Sherman Ripley opened more than a fifth of all existing climbing routes in the Drakensberg.

ABOVE: *Martin Winter in his old climbing hat.* MERVYN GANS



Martin Winter, Jim Thomson, Des Watkins, Gillian Bettle, Sherman Ripley, Lorna Pierson. KAREN KOHLER

Martin was the guest speaker at the Legends Evening, telling his stories with eyes twinkling – stories almost impossible to believe unless you’ve met the man. Martin had the audience spell-bound; he even brought with him the old floppy climbing hat he’d worn on those many climbs long ago.

On the Legends Evening we were privileged to have with us Des Watkins and Martin Winter, Lorna Pierson, Gillian Bettle, Sherman and Audrey Ripley, Jim Thomson, Jack Day, Frank Bailey, Rae Adams, Norman Harte, Harry Tripe, Margaret-Anne Basson and Kay Nixon.

These extraordinary men and women had each contributed more than 50 years of membership to the Mountain Club of South Africa. Sadly, Malcolm Moor and Ginger Cairns were not able to attend at the last moment. Loyalty certificates were also presented to a further 35 people who had each been members of the Club for over 40 years.



KwaZulu-Natal Section Presidents: (left to right: from present in reverse chronological order) Scott Sinclair, Mark Misselhorn, Gavin Raubenheimer, Steve Cooke, André Delais, Fred Hutchinson, Mervyn Gans, Jaap Earle, Sherman Ripley. KAREN KOHLER

A very special award was presented to another 'legend' of the Club, Ishmael Ndlovu, the man who has been chief cook at the Mountain Club's July Camps for over 50 years. He, at 84, and Kay Nixon, who has selflessly contributed enormously for decades to the running of the July Camp, have both decided it is time to retire. Many of those present that night remained unconvinced!

Another previous president, Jaap Earle, made a special trip from Johannesburg to act as MC for the evening, and did so most ably and enjoyably, applying his well-remembered, relaxed style of address to great effect. There were, in fact, nine previous presidents present at this auspicious event – Sherman Ripley, Brian Hutchinson, Jaap Earle, Mervyn Gans, André Dalais, Steve Cooke, Gavin Raubenheimer, Mark Misselhorn and Scott Sinclair, our present president – and the guests were treated to the sight of all nine lined up on the stage for a photo-call. We were also delighted to have with us a previous national president, Paul Fatti. The evening was extraordinary in every respect, thanks to all those who attended, and most particularly our 'legends', who made this an occasion never to be forgotten.

A Christmas Present

(WRITTEN 25 DECEMBER 2005)

Letter to Kay Nixen from Rusty Rowsell, ex-MCSA KZN member resident in Tasmania, on the occasion of the 'Salute the Legends' celebration

Dear Kay,

Greetings to a Legend from 4 ex-Natal Section members.

We were sitting outside a hut high in the Tasmanian mountains a couple of weeks ago, sipping the last of our whisky and discussing the Old Days in the Berg and of course, July Camp came up. And with it, came your name as one who shared camps with us and who truly deserved Legendary Status for your extraordinary efforts running July Camps. We resolved to let you know of our admiration for you and to say we were working hard at becoming Legends of a sort.

John Wallace, Barend Poortenaar and I live in Tasmania (the nearest thing to getting off the world) and John I'ons has been coming down from Canberra to make a fourth old timer for quite fabulous trips through the wilds of Tasmania. Last March we climbed Frenchman's Cap – two hard days to get there. This picture shows us on the summit – all of 274 years between us. We have climbed together for three years now, in twos, threes or all four, and have done 12 trips, none easy, reliving those Berg days and spreading the news of South Africa's beautiful mountains to those we meet.

I am including a couple of pictures of our exploits and my 'Drakensberg Reverie' [see page 172], written to remind me of our own beautiful mountains and keep me going through this winter, the wettest we've had in four years here.

Warmest regards and our best wishes to you for the coming years – may they be kind to you.

Yours, Rusty



*Frenchman's Cap summit:
(from left) Rusty Rowsell,
Barend Poortenaar, John
I'ons, John Wallace.*



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FIRST ASCENT OF THE ICIDI PENCIL

ANTHONY VAN TONDER



Author's note: Refer to the 2001 edition of the MCSA Journal for the route description and a very brief mention of the first ascent of this peak. This is an excellent climb as Drakensberg routes go, but to date there has been only one (unsuccessful) attempt at a second ascent. Thinking about that ascent recently, I felt that the details of the drama of a first climb on an unknown peak deserved to be told.

I had got myself comfortable on a soft tuft of grass, leaning my back against a large rock on the big ledge formed by a notch in the eastern arête of the shark-fin-shaped pinnacle. As I drank some water from my bottle I admired the view to the east over KwaZulu-Natal from my high perch. I was relaxed and ready to be entertained. I could sit back and watch Gavin Peckham, who would be leading the next pitch, armed with a drill and bolts to overcome the blank section of rock that had turned him back previously.

Hidden away in a side gully of Icidi Pass, Malcolm Pearce discovered this pinnacle in the 1950s and published a dramatic photograph of it in his book *A Camera in Quathlamba*. After seeing the photo in 2000 for the first time, Gavin had roped Bruce Sobey in to climb it, but they had been thwarted by blank rock on the fourth pitch. Now they had returned with extra hardware, accompanied by me and Bruce's young son Dave. Also accompanying us on the hike in were John Hone (hoping to outdo Malcolm by photographing the pinnacle with a climber on the summit) and his friend Robbie, to help him carry his camera gear.

The climb up the eastern arête had gone smoothly so far. We were slowed down only by the size of our party, there being four of us to climb each pitch in turn. Until now the trickiest move had been getting up from the nek onto the arête at the start of the first pitch, which Bruce had led. Gavin had led the second pitch and I had taken the third.

Gavin Peckham looking towards The Eastern Buttress during the walk across the Amphitheatre to Icidi. ANTHONY VAN TONDER

Now the next pitch, which had an overhanging section in the middle, loomed above our comfortable ledge. We could see that the overhang could be bypassed on the left by climbing up a recess. However, this led onto a blank scooped-out face that capped the overhangs. It was not at all obvious how one would proceed beyond it.

Then, to my surprise, Gavin dumped the big heavy drill at my feet as well as the rack of Friends, pitons and hammer etc. 'It' had been decided that I was leading this pitch, he announced. This sudden change of circumstances shattered my torpor. I wondered suspiciously why he had relinquished the coveted lead.

'I have never put bolts in rock before,' I protested, although the challenge of leading up into unclimbed territory was appealing. 'Come on, you'll get your name first in the route description!' he cajoled.

A few minutes were spent familiarising myself with the workings of the drill, and pre-fitting hangers and nuts onto a few stainless steel 10 mm expansion bolts which were then added to the rack. First the heavy rack went around my neck, then a sling to hang the drill. I was disconcerted by the drill's cumbersome swinging weight as I set off up the climb. Knocking in a few pitons as I went, I soon reached Gavin's previous high point on a block at the top of the recess. The sling from which he had abseiled down was still around the block.

I contemplated the smooth rock face above me for a while. The scooped shape of the face formed a sloping shelf at the bottom where it curved out above the overhangs. It looked as though I would be able to do an awkward mantel move up onto this sloping shelf and then stand up. To protect this move I first drilled and fitted a bolt, as high as I could reach. After clipping my rope to the bolt with a runner, horribly encumbered by the heavy drill around my neck, I succeeded in doing the mantel move and, balancing delicately by means of a tiny hold for my left hand, I stood up on the sloping shelf. I was relying totally on the friction of my sticky rubber soles to keep me there.

Where to now? Directly up the smooth rock would be impossible unless one drilled a ladder of bolts and aid-climbed up them. We wanted to free-climb the route using a few bolts for protection only, not as aid. I traversed delicately two metres to the right, moving away from the security of the bolt, working my feet along the sloping shelf above the overhangs and finding tiny finger-holds for balance. Stabilising myself with my left hand on the best little hold I could find, I unslung the drill from my neck with my right hand and swung it up to shoulder height as far out to my right as I could reach. My extended arm strained with the weight as I started drilling. Once it had penetrated a little, the drill bit helped support some of the load. I could not push on the drill as I would have pushed myself off the rock face. I tried desperately to suppress the 'sewing machine' that was suddenly making my right leg shake, threatening to make my foot slip. Fortunately Drakensberg basalt is not very hard and it didn't take too long to drill the hole in this tiring position. Holding onto the rock face with only one hand free I worked awkwardly, first re-slinging the drill around my neck, then unclipping a bolt with its hanger from the bandolier, pushing it a few millimetres into the hole, hoping it would stay there while I unclipped the hammer, then knocking it in, re-clipping the hammer to the bandolier, unclipping the spanner to



tighten the nut, replacing the spanner on the bandolier, taking a runner and clipping it to the hanger, then finally pulling up some rope and clipping it into the runner ... at which point I could again feel secure. *Phew.*

Further right, about a metre beyond the bolt, the smooth face ran out at a corner, beyond which I could not see. A very good handhold was visible on the corner. I resumed the delicate traverse, passing the bolt, then, leaning out to the right, managed to get first one then both hands onto the good hold. Hanging from my fingers, I swung my legs around the corner where they fortunately found a small ledge to stand on. The short face that was now revealed above me had thin, but good holds on it. I placed another bolt as far up the face as I could reach. Then, struggling on the thin holds due to rope drag as well as the clumsy weight of the drill, I climbed the few moves to the top of this face. There, to my relief and delight, I reached a large grassy ledge, formed by another notch in the arête. My fellow climbers cheered below.

I set up a belay and my three partners soon followed me up to the large ledge. The summit was now visible less than a rope's length higher, but it was still not clear how we would reach it, as no obvious line beckoned. I was told that having done a good job on the fourth pitch, I was to be 'rewarded' with the task of leading the final pitch too. At least I would no longer need to lug the heavy drill along.

ABOVE: *Anthony van Tonder starting up the fourth pitch.* GAVIN PECKHAM

BELOW: *Bruce Sobey, still on the summit, waits his turn to abseil down in the fading light.*

ANTHONY VAN TONDER, AFTER HAVING DESCENDED



After climbing up a few metres my progress was stopped by smoothly curving bulges of rock that offered little in the way of handholds or protection. During his previous explorations from higher up the pass, Gavin had seen a ledge running across the north face. Armed with this information I moved to the right of the arête towards the north face that formed the side of the sharkfin shape, my feet inching along a little bulge, the palms of my hands pressed against the smooth rock for balance. As I progressed around the curvature of the rock, the little bulge under my feet gradually developed into a narrow ledge, and as the north face came into view I saw that the ledge ran right across it to the opposite western arête, getting wider as it went. Gavin's long-range vision had done good!

A thin crack near the start of the ledge was soon home to a piton and I began a spectacular traverse across the north face of the Icidi Pencil. This was the highlight of the climb: high exposed climbing on good rock with good holds, adequately protected by several Friend placements in good cracks. At the end of the ledge were some large blocks, from the top of which I was able to pull up onto the steep western arête of the sharkfin. Feeling elated with the quality of the climbing, I paused to wave to John and Robbie, whom I could now see. They were waiting in position on the steep slopes below with the camera ready on its tripod. As soon as I came into view John swung into action, as it was getting late and the light was fading. A few minutes later I was on top, whooping and jumping with delight. I posed briefly for John to get his photos then sat down to belay the others up to the summit.

As I sat up there I reflected how, in an age when there are very few unclimbed peaks left, we were very privileged to have been able to make the first ascent of such a fine peak, and how especially privileged I was to have led that wonderful last pitch.

ROCK CLIMBING IN THE ONGOYE FOREST RESERVE

GAVIN PECKHAM



Full many a flower is born to blush unseen ...

THOMAS GRAY

General

Most people, even locals, are unaware of the forested jewel that nestles on the crest of the Ongoye Hills of Zululand. The Ongoye Forest Reserve is about 150 km north of Durban and barely 20 km off the N2 toll road, yet it is visited by only a few of the most ardent birdwatchers. A large granite slab on the seaward slopes of the hills is visible from the R102 and, after eyeing it on my way to work each day, I eventually decided to investigate the climbing potential. For those who are interested in obscure and secluded places, here is a brief description of this little-known treasure.

The Ongoye Hills are located between Eshowe and Empangeni in Zululand. They are about 15 km inland and run parallel to the coast. The reserve is about 4 000 hectares in extent and includes the remnants of a once extensive coastal forest as well as rolling grasslands with rocky outcrops. There are spectacular views out over the coastal plains and across to the Indian Ocean as well as inland views over the historic Nkwale Valley. In the mid-1800s the famous 'White Zulu Chief', John Dunn, made these hills the site of his summer residence because of their pleasant climate and abundant game. The game and most of the forests are long gone but their remnants in the Ongoye Forest Reserve are a significant reminder of how we have squandered our heritage.

Access

Road access to the Reserve is described on the Zululand Birding Route website currently hosted at: <http://www.zbr.co.za/sz/ongoye.htm>. The main ac-

Gavin Peckham on Flakey at Ongoye. SALLY HOFMYER

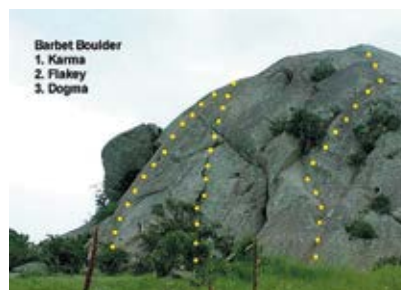
cess road is currently being upgraded with concrete strips over the rough and steep sections. This will greatly facilitate access to the Reserve. A 4WD will cruise up and also give access to vague tracks within the Reserve. As you reach the top of the hills the double concrete strips end abruptly at a crossroad formed by vague tracks in the middle of the veld. Turn right and follow the track for about a kilometre to reach the offices on your left and the campsite on your right. It is mandatory to check in at the office on arrival.

Facilities and costs

A rustic birdwatchers' lodge at a secluded spot in the forest is nearing completion. Details will doubtless be made available on the Zululand Birding Route website soon. The camping area is fully fenced, totally secure and there is good cellphone reception in most areas. The ablution blocks are not yet functional and it is necessary to bring everything you need with you, especially water. There is currently nowhere to bath except for some tiny forest streams. These carry good populations of indigenous minnows and much else beside – NO SOAP PLEASE!!!! Eco-friendly bush-toilet methods are required. Should you be unfamiliar with these please treat yourself to a copy of Kathleen Meyer's classic book, *How to Shit in the Woods*. If 'living close to nature' doesn't suit you, then go and wallow in luxury in the coastal village of Mtunzini and drive up to the Reserve each day. The current fees are R10 per person for day visits and R10 per person per night for camping – a trivial amount to pay for the privilege of access to this beautiful area.

Flora and fauna

Spectacular, panoramic views and walks through pristine forest and beautiful, park-like uplands provide the backdrop for the Ongoye 'specials'. These include the endemic Green Barbet, the Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon, the Ongoye Red Squirrel and the Zululand Dwarf Chameleon. Apart from these, numerous other rare species are routinely observed here. These include the Green Twinspot, Orange and Yellow Throated Longclaw, Narina Trogon, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Samango



TOP: Barbet B routes.

CENTRE: Barbet Boulder West Face.

BELOW: Lorna Backhouse climbing a route on the Ongoye Slabs in the Ongoye Forest Reserve.

ANTHONY VAN TONDER



Granite outcrops in the Ongoye Forest Reserve. ANTHONY VAN TONDER

monkeys, blue duiker, thick-tailed bushbaby, forest-green butterfly and many more. Because of the mixture of forest, grassland and rocky outcrops, the flora is extremely diverse and the only known specimen of the cycad, *Encephalartos woodii*, was found here in 1895. The Zululand Birding Route website contains details of the many rare and uncommon plants, birds and animals that may be seen here.

Guides

The main attractions of the Reserve are probably the Green Barbet and the Ongoye Red Squirrel. To virtually guarantee a good view of these and other species, it is possible to hire local guides who are extremely proficient. They must be booked in advance via the contact details on the Zululand Birding Route website mentioned above.

Climbing

The climbing is pleasant and very easily accessible but not spectacular. There are two granite boulders within a couple of hundred metres of the camp and a granite slab on the escarpment facing the sea. About two dozen routes have been opened on these slabs. They range in grade from 9 to 16 and in length from 10 to 30 m. There is no significant gear, so permission has been obtained from the local authorities to bolt the existing routes provided a 'minimum visual impact' approach is adopted. Frictioning and balancing up these granite lines is fun and is good practice for slab climbing which relies much more on finesse than on brute strength.

Routes

1. Barbet Boulder: This 20 m high boulder is prominent on your left as you approach the campsite. There is a vague track through the grass that leads right past the base of the boulder. It is easy to walk off (or up) the back of the boulder. Twelve routes have been opened on the steep, south side of the boulder and there is potential for a couple more lines.

2. Baboon Boulder: To get to this boulder drive along the track up to the abandoned tower and wind generator that are located on the high grassy knoll and viewpoint about 200 m north of the offices and campsite. From here walk inland along the crest of the vague grassy spur and you will see the boulder about 200 m ahead of you. It slopes up gently from the right, but the side on the left (south) is steep. There are three easy routes on the steep face and the potential for a couple of harder lines.

3. Ongoye Slabs: Drive or walk up the track from the offices towards the abandoned tower on the grassy knoll to the north. About two-thirds of the way to the top there are some flat granite slabs in the grass on the left and a clump of bushes about 30 m away to the right, on the edge of the escarpment. There is a path leading to this bush, then through it to a fantastic viewpoint on some granite boulders which are good for sundowners but not worth climbing. Just beyond (north) of this patch of bush there is a flattish, grassy area. Walk across this grass towards the escarpment and then onto some very gently angled granite slabs. Walk down these granite slabs for about 20 m as they steepen until you see a moderately sized boulder with a high point on the uphill side. There are abseil bolts about 5 m left of this boulder and a 40 m abseil takes you to the bottom of the crag. Just below the abseil boulder there is a large clump of assorted vegetation. Abseiling to the left of this vegetation gives access to several lines on the shorter, south side of the slabs whilst abseiling to the right of the vegetation leads to the higher north side of the slab which has several pleasant routes.

Conclusion

Despite the rather limited and easy climbing there is potential for many more routes on slabs and boulders scattered around the Reserve. However, the Ongoye Forest Reserve is a nature lover's paradise and the climbing is an added bonus to be enjoyed in this beautiful, secluded and little-visited area.

Beacon Buttress West Gully

GAVIN RAUBENHEIMER



This route is located on Beacon Buttress on the escarpment face overlooking the path which leads to the chain ladders. It follows a pleasant gully system for four pitches and is on good rock with good protection. In summer this route may be wet.

Approach: Take the path from Sentinel car park, past the Sentinel to where the path splits. To the left is 'the gully' route to the top of the escarpment, while to the right the main path leads to the foot of the chain ladders. Turn left up the gully and follow this rough path for about 100 m until a major grass band appears on the right. Turn right along this and past a tricky step-over on rock. Then scramble down a few metres which brings one to the bottom of a huge gully and chimney system. The first pitch starts here. This gully can be seen when walking past the Sentinel and facing the escarpment.

Pitch 1: E3* (12) 30 m Start on the left and pull up awkwardly into the gully. Follow the gully to the right and up a groove system till under a steep chimney.

Pitch 2: F2 (15) 30 m Climb the chimney on good rock with good protection and exit via a tricky move into a wider area of the main gully.

Pitch 3: D (10) 35 m Follow the gully on easy rock and grass for 35 m.

Pitch 4: C (6) 40 m Scramble to the top and over the escarpment edge.

Descent: Either turn left and walk back down the gully footpath or right to the chain ladders.

First Ascent: Gavin Raubenheimer, Gavin Peckham 1 May 2007

Grade: F2

*Drakensberg routes are still graded according to the old grading system which works better for routes in this environment.

MAPPING THE DRAKENSBERG: THE GREAT TYVEK CONTROVERSY

GAVIN PECKHAM



The mapping of the Drakensberg has a long and fascinating history. The earliest known map of Natal was drawn by Captain Allen Gardner in 1836; in it, the 'Berg is represented by no more than a single straight line running through a blank stretch of country. The first useful map of the 'Berg was drawn by the Stocker brothers and was published in the *Alpine Journal* of 1889. These early maps, and the subsequent development of 'Berg mapping until the 1950s, have been well described by Reg Pearse in his acclaimed book *Barrier of Spears*, now in its third edition.

All this, however, is history, and by the time I took to climbing at an advanced age, Slingsby's far more sophisticated maps had already been in use for many years. These comprised a set of six maps covering the entire length of the Natal Drakensberg. They were printed back-to-back on three sheets of treated paper, and were widely available, extremely hard-wearing and surprisingly cheap. The cartography of these superb maps was co-ordinated by Peter Slingsby for the Directorate of Forestry with assistance from the Natal Parks Board and the MCSA (Natal Section). Occasional, minor errors and deficiencies in Slingsby's maps were noted but in general the maps received nothing but praise. And all was well for several decades.

But undercurrents of insurrection arose in the ranks. Anything as old as Slingsby's maps simply couldn't be good enough! The enhancement and digitising of new aerial photographs and quantum leaps in computer technology and computer software led the infidels to believe that maps of a superior quality could, and should, be produced. And so we braced ourselves and awaited the advent of a new generation of maps.

The arrival of the new maps, a very considerable time after the due date, was heralded with much fanfare. They were spectacular in more ways than one – spectacularly good, and spectacularly bad. Most of Slingsby's minor errors had

Gavin Peckham descendant. GAVIN RAUBENHEIMER

been eliminated, but about double that number of new errors had been generated. New paths had been inspirationally created out of nothing. Cathedral Peak Hotel had been connected to junction C27 near the contour path by a new and exactly linear path which cut straight across rivers, ridges and waterfalls. Not surprisingly, this 'direct' route turned out to be a programming error – to err is human, but to really mess it up you need a computer!

The new computer-generated shading was brilliant. It gave an excellent impression of three-dimensional relief, unless the light came from the wrong angle, you held the map upside down, or your brain did an unplanned mental flip-flop. In any of these cases it eventually dawned on you that the valleys were dry and barren and the rivers were doing a delicate balancing act along the crests of the ridges - the inadvertent flick of a mental switch could invert the entire topography! Nevertheless, this new shading is, by and large, a good thing and makes the maps easier to read – especially for people who can't easily transform contour lines into landscapes.

The nastiest thing about the new set of maps was that, instead of being printed back to back on three sheets, they were printed singly, so you had to buy six of them to obtain a full set. The back of each map carried virtually identical information on conservation, rock art, geology, ecology, flora, fauna and (by the way) safety. When it was suggested that pecuniary interests had been put ahead of practicality, the relevant authorities claimed that they had chosen this six-sheet format, not for financial gain, but in the interests of safety so that hikers and climbers would have access to the 'vital' information on the back of the maps. They failed to explain, however, why this vital information could not have been printed on a separate sheet, thus reducing the total number of sheets required from six to four. Anyway, the end result of this deep concern for our safety is that once you have acquired a full set of six maps, you will also be the proud owner of six almost identical information sheets which describe the duiker six times, the rock kestrel six times, black seed grass six times ... You might lose your way because you didn't read the map properly, but at least you should recognise black seed grass when you stumble upon it.

But I'm rambling ... Now, when the new maps first became available, you could choose between two versions, the plain paper version and the Tyvek version. I'm not sure about the technical details, but Tyvek is some sort of super-strong, waterproof polymer developed by the DuPont company. To start with I conservatively bought a paper copy. It soon fell apart at the folds and disintegrated in my sweaty paws. Obviously, Tyvek was the way to go but, oops, there was a big price difference: the plain-paper maps cost a very reasonable R25 while the Tyvek versions were soon selling for R65.

Let's think about this a bit more. To produce the maps it was necessary to incur the astronomical costs of extensive aerial photography and make extensive use of highly trained staff slaving over advanced computer equipment for countless man-hours. Add the cost of the paper, the sophisticated printing requirements and presumably a small profit margin, and all things considered, R25 was a real bargain. Now, those of you with a mind for advanced mathematics will have already deduced that it must therefore have cost about R40 to roll out a single

sheet of blank Tyvek. If the mapping had cost R40 and the Tyvek sheet R25 it would have seemed less unreasonable, but the other way around, it's a bit like platinum-plating a VW Golf! If the basic map could be produced for R25, then charging anything more than R35 for the Tyvek version hints at extortion.

There was, of course, much discontent. The muttering grew to a grumbling, and the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling (with apologies to Robert Browning). The situation sparked a flurry of emails on one of the climbing chat-lines. After the initial gripes and moans – most of them mentioned here – the tone of the complaints became more light-hearted when the following email was circulated. (The author's name has been omitted and I have inserted the sarky comments in brackets after each of the six numbered points in the original message.)

The Great TYVEK Quiz: OK chaps, brace yourselves!

A part of the blurb on the back of the new 'Berg maps states, 'By printing this map on Tyvek, which is tough and can take it, we designed it to be helpful to you in many different situations apart from the obvious.' This statement is followed by three examples of such uses. I challenge you to distinguish the three examples given on the maps from the three I have dreamt up. If you get 6/6 you are either a genius or are one of the very few who have even bothered to look at the expensive trivia attached to the back of each map – space which could have been much more productively occupied by another map! OK, thinking caps on, here we go!

1. Strong: strips of Tyvek can be used as emergency replacements for broken guy-ropes or pack straps, or for splinting broken limbs, etc. [If it is so strong then how do you cut it into strips? And how do you find your way back home without your vital map?]

2. Waterproof: use it as protection from the rain or a shield against the wind. [Since a single map is barely big enough to cover your head, the rest of your body could become drenched and hypothermic. For this reason, the maps were printed separately so that the complete set of six will provide you with a full suit of body armour!]

3. Informative: the back of the map provides a wide range of useful information. [When you have all six maps you can collate them to make a six-page booklet for rainy, tent-bound days. Any similarity between the six pages is entirely intentional]

4. Durable: can be folded many times without damage – relax and enjoy the outdoors. [Folding and unfolding the map 27 000 times uses energy equivalent to walking 2 metres and is a great form of low-impact exercise.]

5. Versatile: use it as a strong and versatile groundsheet. [Great if you're a dwarf who can fit on one square metre. Remember to put it map-side down on the muddy ground so that you don't ruin the vital information on the back.]

6. Safety: use the reflective properties of the Tyvek to attract attention in case of emergencies. [Hold on tight to your map. Rescuers may be more interested in retrieving your valuable map than in retrieving your worthless self.]

The first respondent who scores a full house of 6/6 will be rewarded with a Tyvek bumper sticker that proclaims, 'I love Tyvek'. The second successful

respondent will be rewarded with two stickers and the third ... Maybe we can start working on a list of '101 Things To Do With A Tyvek Map'! I look forward to your responses. Time to get back to work. Cheers.

This message stimulated an enthusiastic avalanche of emails, each proposing more outrageous applications for Tyvek maps than the last. [*I drew a line at including the entire sequence of responses* – Ed] One of the obvious conclusions that emerged from the exchange of emails is that many hikers and climbers clearly have too much free time on their hands. The email exchange did, however, provide a few lighter moments and hopefully gave those responsible for the new maps a little food for thought with respect to improvements that could be considered for this largely excellent series of maps.

(Correct answers, by the way, were 2, 4 and 5.)

PINNACLE GORGE: A JEWEL OF THE EASTERN CAPE

GAVIN PECKHAM



Full many a gem the deep unfathomed caves of ocean bear ... THOMAS GRAY

‘Sorry, Derek, I just can’t afford it at the moment.’

That was my response when Derek Marshall invited me to join him for an outing to Pinnacle Gorge. Who’s even heard of Pinnacle Gorge? I really couldn’t see myself driving or flying almost 1 000 kilometres to climb at some obscure crag – not even to humour a really good friend. Two days later confirmation and booking details for a return flight from Durban to Port Elizabeth arrived by email, along with a message and words to this effect: ‘Peckham, you’ll be dead soon. Do it now. I’ll pick you up at the airport. Derek.’

What can a man do?

Fast forward to the two of us heading inland in Derek’s bakkie, travelling through some pretty desolate-looking countryside – well, desolate compared to the green hills of KZN, that is. Little did I know what verdant pastures lay concealed not far ahead.

We checked in at the farmer’s house. Even as we approached I could see that there were several impressive gorges cutting back into the Groot Winterhoek hills that graced the skyline. Derek pointed out that Pinnacle Gorge was probably the best, the most accessible of these gorges, and had thus attracted the most attention. The adjacent Momentum Gorge had also seen a spurt of recent route openings but the other, slightly more distant gorges were virtually untouched. The climbing potential of the area is mind-boggling. We stopped in the designated parking area and began the short and pleasant hike up to the camping spot, crossing the idyllic stream several times. The campsite is located next to the stream in a grove of indigenous trees below the pinnacle after which the gorge is named – a more enchanting spot is difficult to imagine.

On our first evening we enjoyed the company of Dirk Versveld and Tessa Cous-

Pinnacle Gorge. GAVIN PECKHAM

ins. Thereafter we had this climber's paradise all to ourselves. As a Natalian used to neat layers of horizontal sandstone, this venue was an eye-opener. Over the course of millennia that had seen the dinosaurs come and go, the stream had carved its way down to expose the ragged bones of the earth, which were jutting skywards at every conceivable angle: Cape fold mountains at their best.

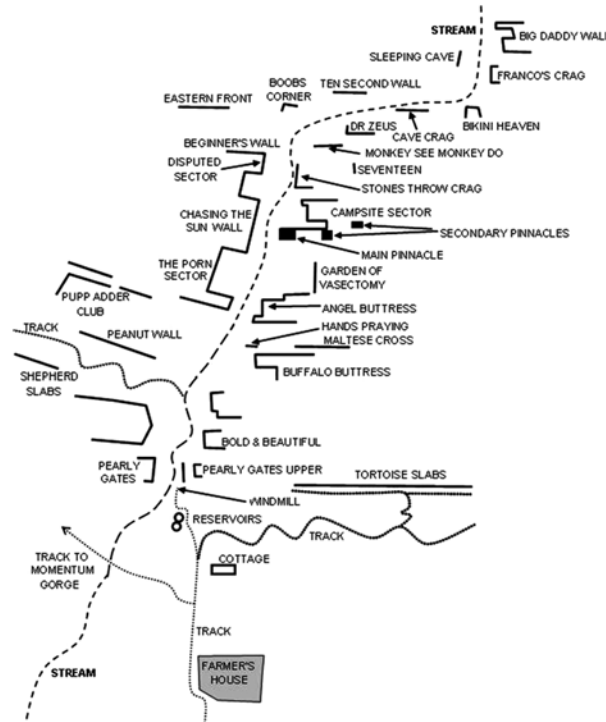
I never got to climb any of the classic routes: Marshall climbs only new routes. Over the next few days we made pigs of ourselves, opening almost 30 new routes up and down the gorge. Four days of splendid weather and four evenings of great camaraderie.

Before I knew it, this memorable trip was over and I was winging my way back home with vivid memories etched in my mind.

Pinnacle Gorge is a safe climbing venue with excellent rock and huge potential for new routes in an unspoiled wilderness area that will delight the heart of any nature lover. Before you die, get yourself to Pinnacle Gorge – it's something you won't regret.

In case you're nibbling at the bait, here are the basic details, per kind favour of Derek Marshall.

Directions: There's a shorter route with more dirt road, but probably the best approach is, from Port Elizabeth, to take the R75 towards Jansenville, bypassing Uitenhage on the way. From the R75 turn left off the tar at Glenconnor. After 17 km you reach a T-junction where you turn right towards Steytlerville. After another 21 km turn left at Willow River and go through a gate 300 m after this turn. Continue for another 9.8 km, then turn left at an unmarked three-way junction. Almost immediately you cross a concrete weir. The farmhouse is about 1.2 km further on. After checking in with the farmer, park opposite the gate with the horse-shoes on it. Continue up the road on foot, through another gate, past two water reservoirs, then left and down where the road continues to a windmill. Follow the path up into the gorge, crossing the stream several times on the way.



Access: Please contact the landowners, Mr and Mrs Rudman, on 049 837 0032 and arrange your arrival in advance. There's a daily access and camping fee which must be paid on arrival. Plan to arrive during daylight hours – the farmers are concerned about their safety and may shoot at unidentified nocturnal arrivals. Park opposite the gate to the farmyard and proceed on foot. Local climbers love Pinnacle – if you want to live, don't do anything to jeopardise access!

History: The first recorded route on the Pinnacle was opened by John Grindley, Tim Robertson and Bradley Champion in 1971. Since then several routes opened by Andrew Forsyth have been published in various MCSA journals. Other than this, not much is known about the history of climbing in Pinnacle Gorge. In 2003 Derek Marshall and his gang of 'Buffalo Bastards' began their trips there and opened a plethora of new routes.

Where to stay: While you can camp anywhere in the gorge, the most popular camping spot is next to the stream adjacent to the Pinnacle, an obvious spire about 45 m high. There are no facilities, so please exercise eco-friendly camping practices. If you prefer to wallow in luxury, the Rudmans also hire out a very comfortable cottage. It has a fridge, stove, lights and great beds. It sleeps three in beds and a couple more on fold-downs in the lounge.

Security: Once you're within the gorge, you're totally secure. However, the farmers in these parts stand no nonsense, so don't be seen in the vicinity of the farmhouse at night.

Environmental issues: This is a pristine wilderness area. Please ensure that all members of your party adhere strictly to standard wilderness protocols. The major issue is toiletry: stay far away from the stream, as it supplies the farmer's drinking water. (A long-drop will be built soon.) Swim and bathe in the stream, but don't use soap. Don't spit toothpaste into the water or onto the rocks. Feel free to trim the paths, but don't go berserk. Hack as many wattles as you can! Don't leave any rubbish – not even braai bones. Carry in your own firewood.

Climate: Pinnacle Gorge offers year-round climbing. Winter has low rainfall and is very mild. In summer it may become hot and humid, especially after rain. However, there are plenty of crags with shade all day and the rock dries quickly after rain.

The rock: Sandstone and quartzite ridges, set in an open gorge, poke up at every conceivable angle. Like any crag that hasn't been subjected to heavy traffic, there's some loose stuff, but generally the rock is of a superb quality.

The routes: Most routes are single-pitch trad lines but there are several multi-pitch routes and some lines have been bolted. Many routes follow crack lines, but a good selection of face and corner climbs is also available.

Route guide: Apart from a few routes described in MCSA journals, no published guide for the area is available. Either wander around and climb anything that appeals to you or contact Derek Marshall to send you his personal collection of RDs – hundreds of them! In return you can send him a donation to his bolting fund.

Hazards, safety and warnings: Use a helmet – there's plenty of loose rock. This is puffadder and Cape cobra country – keep your eyes peeled or let your belay partner walk in front of you. Baboons could be a hazard and should be considered dangerous – don't corner them or approach them in any way.

SAFETY WHILE TOP ROPING ON SHUNT

BRUCE SOBEY

Many of us top rope on a shunt, either for training, or when bolting. However, I have always had some queries on the best setup. An accident during the long weekend in August 2009 brought this into sharp focus.

A group of us were climbing at Wit Umfolozi. I was climbing *Hedge Hopper* on Primeval Wall and Gavin Peckham was shunting a (possible) new line to the left of it.

At the top Gavin came off (or sat back on the rope – memory is a bit vague here), the shunt did not take, and he slipped (plummeted!) down until he hit a narrow ledge about 6 m down. This shook up the system apparently, so that the shunt took and prevented him from falling a further 20 m. I was able to climb up above him and lower him to the ground (a Munter hitch does work), but the impact on the ledge had damaged his Achilles tendon (and he had rope burn on his hands).

Gavin is an experienced climber who has climbed hundreds of pitches on shunt, so the question was, what had happened? This generated much debate. Firstly the facts:

1. The route is fairly straight up, just on balance off vertical, with a small overhang or bulge at the top. He fell either when passing, or sitting back just past the overhang.
2. He was climbing on a single 11 mm rope.
3. The Petzl shunt was trailed with an elastic cord around his neck.
4. The shunt was directly connected to his harness with a locking karabiner. Gavin always used a short sling for the connection, but since losing all his climbing gear in a hijacking, he no longer had one, and so had connected his screw gate directly to the shunt as shown in the Petzl brochure.

After looking at all possibilities, I believe I have determined the problem.



Fig 1. Karabiner connected directly to shunt. B SOBE

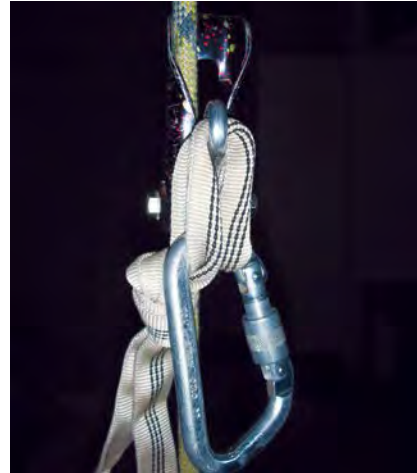


Fig 2. Soft Connection to shunt. B SOBEY

Firstly, Petzl caution against climbing an overhang on a shunt, although many of us do. The sketches in the Petzl safety note make sense, but one would expect that as soon as the climber falls and takes pressure off the lever, it should lock. In this case, where the overhang was very small and the route on balance, the rope was off vertical for a large portion of his fall. This means there should not be pressure on the lever, and one would expect the shunt to operate.

The question is, why did the shunt not take after Gavin fell and released the pressure on the lever? Furthermore, can we duplicate the situation?

After some thought and experiment I found I could fairly easily duplicate the situation *if the shunt was directly connected with a karabiner as shown in the petzl brochure*. Although, when shown, I have not found anyone who disagrees with the failure mode, people find it hard to follow from a description. But here goes anyway.

Refer to Figure 1. If the karabiner moves sideways as shown (which happens easily in practice as one moves up), there is more area to press the lever in. Presuming the rope is reasonably tight (weighted or out full length below), and if there is a sudden pull down on the connection point (index finger) WHILE PRESSED IN the lever becomes side loaded due to the angled karabiner. It will lock in the pressed-in position, and the shunt will slip indefinitely. [Note that the little finger is positioned to hold the shunt from slipping.]

This happens because the shunt has only a weak spring. Just a small side load or twisting load by the karabiner is enough to hold it in, once it has already been pressed in. In fact the lever does not have to be pushed in very much for the shunt to slip; all that is necessary is for the lever to be locked in position so the shunt does not grip. When experimenting I found that a double rope was not significantly better than a single rope.

(I have found that people easily duplicate this once shown how it works – the stomach, especially an ample one, would press it in when climbing through an overhang or over a rock projection.)

Refer to Figure 2. BUT, if I use a soft connection using a short length of sling or prussic cord threaded through the eye of the shunt, as shown in Figure 2, a number of things happen: the lever is less likely to press in; and one cannot get the lever to lock in because the lever cannot be side loaded by the karabiner. In addition, on an overhang, the small extra length allows one to put the rope to one side, which keeps it straighter and prevents the shunt lever from being pressed in because the shunt turns side on.

It is however important to keep the sling short enough so that it cannot hook over the top of the shunt (especially when using a single rope), or it can also cause the shunt to slip. While a short sling will make little difference, a long sling will also increase the fall factor, which in itself could cause the shunt to fail.

The shunt has some other possible failure modes I know of:

1. When ice climbing it can freeze in the wet (definitely not the case here!).
2. A piece of dirt caught in the shunt not allowing it to lock off (unlikely in this case).
3. Clothes hooked over the top of the shunt causing it to drag down with the climber and slip (also unlikely in this case).
4. The karabiner, if connected directly to the shunt, may shift and hook over the top of the shunt (possible, but much less likely).

At the end of the day what does one do? Prussic loops work, but are not ideal. Although I have not used one, it appears that the Silent Partner was designed for solo climbing, not top roping, and because it is designed to slip somewhat it is not ideal for top roping. (It needs a safety backup knot tied in any event.)

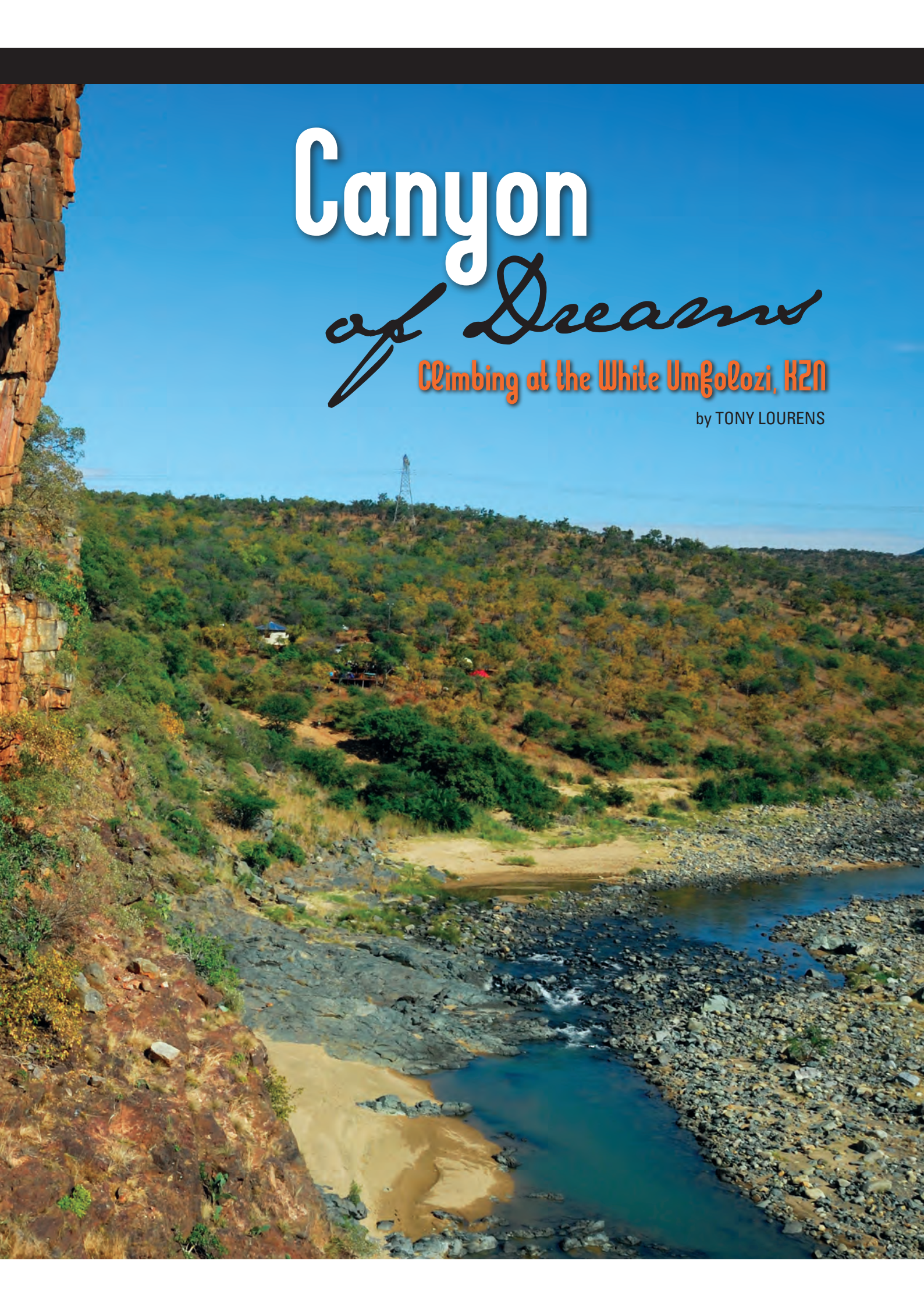
So what is the safety takeout of this accident? I believe we can still climb safely on a shunt if we follow some basic rules:

1. A shunt, like any device, must be backed up – **never trust your life to a single device** (at least, not if you can help it!). Tie a knot in the rope below you in case the shunt slips (especially if you are to risk an overhang).
2. Climb on double ropes and clip two quick draws into your harness and around each of the ropes in case the shunt fails. This will stop you at the knot you have tied even if the shunt fails, and you have a redundant safety system.
3. **Never** connect directly into a shunt with a karabiner as shown in the brochure. Use a short sling or stout prussic cord threaded through the eye of the shunt to connect to your screw gate. This will remove at least one major failure mode (even if possibly introducing a much more minor failure mode).
4. Make sure your connection is **short**. It must definitely not be long enough to hook on the top of the shunt. If you only have long slings or prussics, tie a knot in the end of one to make a short piece to thread through the shunt as shown in Figure 2.

Note that I am not recommending that people go out and top rope any overhangs on a shunt. But whatever you top rope on a shunt, I believe that keeping these safety rules may save you some pain and suffering.

Bugs Sprouse and Hansie van Rooyen on the sensational first pitch of *Day Tripper* (17), the Power Wall. Photo ANTHONY VAN TONDER



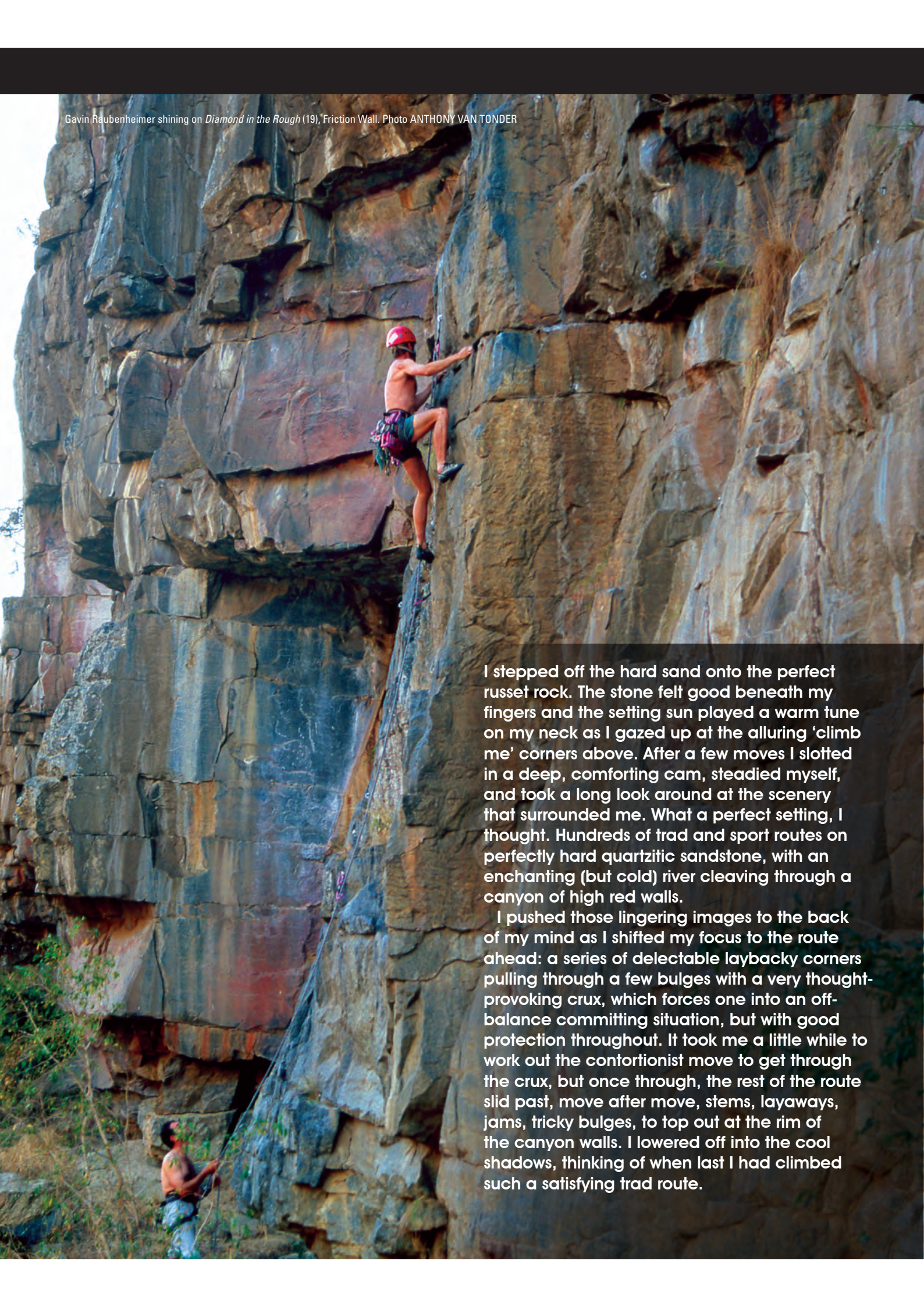


Canyon

of Dreams

Climbing at the White Umfolozi, KZN

by TONY LOURENS



Gavin Raubenheimer shining on *Diamond in the Rough* (19), Friction Wall. Photo ANTHONY VAN TONDER

I stepped off the hard sand onto the perfect russet rock. The stone felt good beneath my fingers and the setting sun played a warm tune on my neck as I gazed up at the alluring 'climb me' corners above. After a few moves I slotted in a deep, comforting cam, steadied myself, and took a long look around at the scenery that surrounded me. What a perfect setting, I thought. Hundreds of trad and sport routes on perfectly hard quartzitic sandstone, with an enchanting (but cold) river cleaving through a canyon of high red walls.

I pushed those lingering images to the back of my mind as I shifted my focus to the route ahead: a series of delectable laybacky corners pulling through a few bulges with a very thought-provoking crux, which forces one into an off-balance committing situation, but with good protection throughout. It took me a little while to work out the contortionist move to get through the crux, but once through, the rest of the route slid past, move after move, stems, layaways, jams, tricky bulges, to top out at the rim of the canyon walls. I lowered off into the cool shadows, thinking of when last I had climbed such a satisfying trad route.

Having recently been in conversation with local KZN climber, doyen of the White Umfolozi (or Wumf as the locals call it) and author of the latest Wumf guidebook, Gavin Peckham, I learned that the KZN Mountain Club were to hold a climbing meet at this pristine venue in the month of June. I hadn't been on a climbing trip to KZN for quite some time, so thought it a good idea to escape the miserable freezing Cape winter for a time and sizzle my frozen digits on warm subtropical stone. It was also a chance to revisit old haunts and have a drink and a chinwag with some of my old and now greying climbing mates up in that part of the world.

Our short vacation started on the south coast with a very brief visit to the super shlauky and very dirty Uvongo crag near Margate. One look and a tentative feel, which made our hands come away black and greasy, made us opt for the nearest pub. After that, Patsy and I made our way through the charming Midlands Meander, where we stayed at one of those lovely old country inns on the foot of the Drakensberg. It was the ideal time and place to produce a little box I had secretly hidden and to pop the ultimate question to Patsy, which to my relief she accepted with a *yes!* Anyway, enough of the shmaltzy romantic stuff. The next day we met Gavin Raubenheimer, another long-standing KZN climber, for a stint of climbing at the relatively newish Umgeni crag. This is probably one of KZN's most established sport crags with a huge number of excellent sport routes (but no real easy ones) from about grade 18 upwards. It also boasts some impeccable trad lines like the not-to-be-missed *Crack Addiction* (19), a real classic.

So our time had come to mosey on down to the White Umfolozi to meet up with about 20 local climbers (and one or two from Gauteng) to engage in some climbing and, as it turned out, a lot of fun and evening entertainment. Set in a picturesque gorge above a slightly more than gurgling stream, the Wumf is a series of red and grey sandstone walls and crags, simply made for climbing. Mostly single-pitch, but also some really good two-pitch routes. Climbing started there in the early '90s and progressed at a reasonably steady rate over two decades. This has produced an incredible number of really good quality routes on both sides of the river, scattered along about 500 metres of canyon. Sport and trad that live side by side. >>

Rodney Owen sitting pretty on *A Fine Line* (16), Upper Power Wall.
Photo ANTHONY VAN TONDER





. . . to catch a few routes and the last golden rays of the setting sun.

We arrived in the late afternoon with only an hour or two left of daylight, but true to KZN hospitality, Gavin and a few others took us to the closest crag to catch a few routes and the last golden rays of the setting sun. The routes were short but fun and simply whetted our appetite for what was to come.

The next three days saw endless goups of climbers arriving and leaving, some only staying overnight; others the whole four days and longer. The days consisted of a leisurely breakfast, then breaking into various groups and pairs to go pick out some good routes to climb. The most popular crags were Friction Wall which has some really fantastic sport routes up to grade 21 and also *Psychobabble Rap*, an impeccable grade 20 trad route. Across the river, getting most of the day's sun, Upper Warrior Wall rises out of a stunning beach setting and is home to some really good trad and sport routes from grade 16 to 25. At any given time you could see people picnicking, reading, chatting on the beach below the wall, while others grappled with their chosen route.

The real fun, however, came on the final evening. After three solid days of climbing, the mood was swinging into party mode and over the last few days Patsy and I were warned about these rowdy KZN climber types. And so, the truth was about to be revealed. After everyone had braaied their meat and ate their fill, the fire was stoked and fed until a pyrotechnics dream filled the black African night.

Everyone found themselves a perch around the roaring blaze and bottles and flasks of various potions were passed around. Once a bottle was opened you took one swig and waved goodbye, as it was passed around the circle never to be retrieved again. The banter got louder as the night deepened. Tales of climbing adventures were bandied about willy-nilly, always with a healthy dose of exaggeration and with the sole aim of bringing others into disrepute. As with any group of party animals, there is always one storyteller >>

Tony Lourens laying away on the super classic *Batman* (17), Upper Warrior Wall. Photo PATSY SCOTT

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Campfire 'kuiring' with storyteller extraordinaire
Ce'sar de Carvalho at his best. Photo TONY LOURENS



that leaps out from the babbling masses and this time (as with most times, I hear from the locals) it was Ce'sar de Carvalho, Portuguese man-o'-war and seasoned reciter of tales sketched in such animated style, you almost felt you were there. And true to style, trousers were dropped at various intervals to emphasise a point here and there. Following close behind him, however, was seasoned KZN climber Gerald Camp, who also carried the story garland from time to time and, not to be outdone, whirled the old todger around to add 'weight' to his tales. Eventually, when every last drop of wine, beer and other beverage had been consumed, it was time to call it a night.

The next morning saw a dreary bunch of climbers make for the crags to fit in a few routes before packing up. The trip was over, but the memories are indelibly stamped and, on our way to the airport, we were already making plans to return to this canyon of dreams.

The White Umfolozi is without a doubt one of the most user-friendly climbing venues in the country, offering superb easy to mid-grade sport and trad routes in a setting that is incomparable. Every climber in SA should visit this pristine place to sample climbing at its best.

Thanks to Anthony van Tonder who organised the meet, to Gavin Peckham for all his dedicated work at the Wumf, which makes it the excellent venue it is, to the Portuguese man-o'-war for keeping us entertained and sharing a rope with me on some real classics, and to all who were there and shared in the great climbing and fun.

The KZN crowd hold regular meets at the Wumf and I will be on the lookout for likely candidates to join in next winter for another round of awesome cragging and warm KZN hospitality. ♀

Grizzled KZN climbing legend, Gerald Camp, keeps it together through the crux of *Picture Frame* (21), Friction Wall. Photo CE'SAR DE CARVALHO



On the sensational *R 34* (14), Friction Wall. One of the best sport routes of that grade you will find anywhere. Photo CE'SAR DE CARVALHO



FACT FILE

HOW TO GET THERE

Fly to Durban, hire a car and drive about two hours north to near Ulindi. The guidebook will have detailed directions.

ACCESS

The north bank and south bank are each privately owned (separate owners). The campsite is on the south bank and is open to climbers. The north bank is not officially open to climbing, but the owner is never there, so it is accessed from the south bank by crossing the river. Please be respectful at all times and call the south bank owner (Mr Gerhard Greef, 082 495 4943) before arriving.

ACCOMMODATION

The campsite is situated among trees overlooking the canyon (which gives a mega five-minute approach walk to the routes). The camping itself consists of a wooden deck and scattered mini-sites among the wooded surrounds. There are also two very rustic rondawels, one for two people and a larger one that sleeps five and has a table and sink, etc. Between all this is another wooden deck with a table, chairs, two gas stoves and a fireplace, for cooking eating and generally 'kuiering'. It has been the nucleus of many a drunken party. There is also a solar heated shower and flushing toilet with a view.

WHEN TO GO

KZN is definitely a winter climbing venue, particularly the Wumf. So anytime between April and September would be good. There are two banks, so it is easy to choose between shade and sun, and at this time of year the weather is normally stable with little rain.

GUIDEBOOK

Rock Climbing at the White Umfolozi by Gavin Peckham is the definitive guide to the area and a must-have if you are planning a trip there. It gives you all the info you need, and is well laid out and easy to use. It is available from Gavin on gavin.peckham@gmail.com. Gavin is also your go-to man if you need any additional information or updates.

THE ROCK AND THE CLIMBING

The Wumf is home to several hundred excellent trad and sport routes, enough to keep you busy for many trips. The rock is mostly of impeccable quartzitic sandstone offering good protection on the trad lines. The climbing is generally not of a very steep nature, but rather vertical and sometimes slabby. However, there are a few steeper routes for the picking if so desired. The sport routes are well bolted.

Gavin Peckham's hit list

God's Great Banana Skin (24) [5B; C] *****
Psychobabble Rap (20) [C] ***** trad
Carnivore (19) [9B; C] *****
Cold Stone Jug (19) [10B; C] *****
Rock Me Baby (19) [10B; C] *****
The Powers That Be (19) ***** trad
Infidels (18) [12B; C] *****
Cat Woman (18) [9B; C] *****
Devil in Disguise (18) [9B; C] *****
Batman (17) ***** trad

Day Tripper (17) ***** trad
Sky Walker (17) ***** trad
The Lorax (17) ***** trad
Zulu Blade (17) [9B; C]
Ali's Line (15) [7B; C] *****
Tokoloshe (14) [9B; C] *****
Mamba (13) [C] ***** trad
Harry (13) [6B; C] *****
The Easy Way Out (12) ***** trad

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JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

A NEW FIVE-PITCH, SOUTHERN DRAKENSBERG CAVE SANDSTONE CLIMB

ANTHONY VAN TONDER



When Hallam Payne announced that he and Murray Sanders were going to camp in Sleeping Beauty Cave and climb *The Monk* on the weekend of 4 and 5 May 2013, it reminded me that there was a climbing project on the big sandstone cliffs opposite the cave that had been awaiting my return for 11 years.

In 2002, Bugs Sprouse and I had taken my children, who were five years old at the time, on their first Berg hike to camp at Sleeping Beauty Cave, only a five kilometre walk. Looking out of the cave entrance one sees a very obvious large oblique corner/roof system that runs from left to right up the big sandstone cliffs opposite the cave. We were immediately intrigued by the possibility of climbing this feature. Berg sandstone is seldom climbed as it is mostly too steep and featureless, except where there is a large crack system such as on *The Monk*. The on-balance sloping nature of this rock formation looked like it could be climbed. A few weeks later, as Bugs had gone overseas for six months, I went back to investigate with Gavin Peckham. The rock was quite smooth and it was clear that some bolts would be needed to protect the route, but we had forgotten an essential item of bolting equipment at home. And so the project was put on hold and quickly the years ticked by ...

I phoned Bugs Sprouse and Ian Bailey and they were both keen to join Hallam and Murray for the May weekend at Sleeping Beauty Cave and to attempt the climb. I bought some hangers in Pietermaritzburg and Bugs got some bolts in Durban and he charged the drill battery. After I finished work on Saturday morning, we fetched Ian in Pietermaritzburg and Hallam in Merrivale, and left for Underberg at about lunch time, driving through heavy rain near Boston. We met Murray in an overcast Underberg where a very cold wind was blowing. Fortunately, at Garden Castle, there was less wind and no rain when we started

ABOVE: *Hallam Payne topping out on the final pitch.* ANTHONY VAN TONDER

walking at 3:30 pm. Bugs was given the heavy drill to carry, to slow him down on the walk in. We arrived at the cave at 5:00 pm where we settled in comfortably for the night, while the skies slowly cleared to reveal the stars.

At the freezing crack of dawn on Sunday 5 May, Hallam and Murray arose to start their strenuous walk up to *The Monk*, while we three 'sleeping beauties' snoozed on until the sun warmed up the world outside. After a leisurely breakfast we strolled the 200 metres across to the base of the route.

From the bottom of the rock slabs we scrambled up about eight metres to a vegetated ledge where a large Friend in the corner provided a belay for the start. I led off up the first pitch which was mostly friction climbing with occasional good holds. As natural protection placements were very sparse, I drilled and placed four widely-spaced bolts while leading this pitch. After 47 metres I reached a stance on a comfortable but narrow grassy ledge with a small crack for a piton to belay.

Bugs led the second pitch of 20 metres, placing two more bolts, up more friction slabs and up through a gap under the roof then down onto a large ledge with cracked blocks to belay from. The view was spectacular from up here.

I then led the third pitch of 30 metres. Bugs had already placed another bolt about four metres above the stance, but when I climbed up there the blankness of the rock thwarted further upward progress. So I traversed right for about eight metres, along a scooped-out foot rail in the face, using under-clings. Now came a committing move to pull up onto very small but positive holds on the face above the scoop and I feared that the little holds might break off. The drill battery was old and going flat and we wanted to keep the bolting to a minimum anyway, so I did the tricky move unprotected, encumbered by the heavy drill around my neck, and was very relieved that nothing broke off. I continued up excellent rock with very positive small nodules and finger pockets, placing a bolt eight metres higher up, and then climbed up past a very big flake with a Friend placement to a large prominent yellow block leaning against the corner where a sling around the pinch point gave a good belay.

The fourth pitch led by Bugs started with a four-metre, horizontal traverse across a very smooth steep slab, the crux of the route. This was protected by placing our last bolt before the drill battery went completely flat. He then continued another 30 metres without protection up two slabs to set up a belay among some blocks under the roof.

I led the final 30-metre pitch which traversed out across a huge slab where I laboriously placed a bolt using a hand drill, then finished by stemming up a water runnel to the top.

A hundred metres to the right is a bushy gully which descends parallel to the climb and we scrambled down this back to the base of the route where we collected our hiking boots. After eating lunch in the cave it was an hour's easy walk back to the car at Garden Castle.

This had been a really enjoyable and relaxed climbing weekend. So good that three weeks later Bugs and I returned with Hallam Payne and Cesar de Carvalho to repeat the route and to add a few more bolts to make it safer. This is one of very few established routes on Drakensberg Cave Sandstone. It can be climbed in three hours or less. The grade of all the pitches is about 15 or 16, (F2). Sticky rubber

climbing shoes are necessary for friction climbing. This route provides very pleasant climbing in a spectacular position, has probably the easiest and shortest walk-in of any Drakensberg route and has a convenient large cave to camp in as well.

Route Description

Time: Five hours climbing, but this included placing bolts on lead. Can easily be done in three hours.

Approach: From Garden Castle office walk to Sleeping Beauty Cave (about five kilometres). From the cave the route is visible as the very obvious large oblique corner system that runs from left to right up the sandstone crag opposite the cave. From the cave walk slightly up and left for about 200 metres to the base of the route. From the bottom of the rock slab scramble up about eight metres to a vegetated ledge and place a big Cam in the crack in the corner on the left to belay.

Pitch 1. 47 m F2. Climb up the ramp for 47 metres, passing four bolts and a large flake where a Cam can be placed (between the third and fourth bolts), to a comfortable grassy ledge. (Some of the bolts are in hollows and not easily seen from below.) Belay from a piton at the right-hand end of the grass about four metres from the corner.

Pitch 2. 20 m F2. This is a short pitch. Continue up past a bolt to an overhanging section. There is another bolt above this overhang in the yellow rock near the corner on the left. Pull up onto the yellow rock under the corner roof and climb up, over and down onto a large vegetated ledge to belay from cracks between some large blocks using Cams.

Pitch 3. 30 m F3. Climb up to a bolt on the left above a horizontal scooped-out footrail. If using twin ropes, clip only one rope to this bolt. Traverse easily right along this footrail using nice under-clings for about eight metres to another bolt and clip the other rope here. (If using a single rope do not clip the bolt on the left, but proceed straight to the bolt on the right). Pull up into the hollow above the small overhang using small but very good positive finger and toe holds. (Be careful not to let your left rope snag under the overhang as you pull up). Continue straight up excellent rock with nice nodules and pockets to a bolt. Then climb up diagonally right to a very big flake where a small Cam can be placed. Climb up the flake to a large conspicuous yellow block balancing against the face and squeeze through the wormhole left of the block. Use a long sling around the pinch-point between the block and the face to belay. (A bolt on the traverse at the start of the next pitch can be used to back up the belay if so desired).

Pitch 4. 35 m F3. Passing a bolt, traverse delicately right on very small holds for four metres to a small tree (crux). Climb easily up the slab on the right passing a bolt to a big ledge. Step across the gap then climb up another slab past another bolt to a level vegetated area under the roof in the corner. Belay from a sling around a pinch-point under a block on the right.



View of the route from further up the valley. HALLAM PAYNE

Pitch 5. 30 m E. Traverse out to the right by walking along a groove in the huge slab, pass a bolt and then climb up diagonally right and continue across a rocky spine into a water runnel. There is an excellent Cam placement at the top of the spine just before you cross over into the water runnel. Straddle the wet bit in the centre and climb up the water runnel to a block at the top. Stem up to reach good handholds on top of the block and exit left. Use a long sling around a pointy block on the right to belay.

Descent: Walk about 100 metres to the right to a vegetated gully which descends parallel to the climb. Walk and scramble down this gully to the bottom. It is also possible to take an easier but longer route down by walking further up the valley.

Opening Party: Anthony van Tonder, Bugs Sprouse and Ian Bailey on 5 May 2013.

Comments: This is one of very few established routes on Drakensberg Cave Sandstone, (two others being *The Monk* nearby, and *The Dassie* in the Mnweni area). This route can be climbed using no more than a selection of Cams, six quick-draws and a few slings, including a long sling. Nuts and Hexes are of no use. As there is a lot of friction climbing, proper climbing shoes with sticky rubber soles are necessary. Generally stay away from the pale-coloured rock in the corner on the left which is more sheltered from the weather and has some loose flaky bits on the surface. The dark rock to the right is much better. This route provides very pleasant climbing, has probably the easiest and shortest walk-in of any Drakensberg route and has a convenient cave to camp in as well.

CATHEDRAL ROCK

GAVIN RAUBENHEIMER



Overview

Cathedral Rock is one of the few sea-stacks in South Africa. It is located in a remote area of the Transkei Wild Coast, about midway between Port Edward and Port St Johns. The remote location and wild landscape provide for an esoteric and exciting climbing experience. A unique feature of Cathedral Rock is the huge arch on its south-west side. The main massif of the sea-stack also has an enormous channel running from east to west through its base, but this can only be seen when viewed from the east. Cathedral Rock is commonly photographed from the shore above, but seldom actually climbed.

The shoreline in this area consists of an impressive line of cliffs about 80 metres high which drop straight into the sea. The sea-stack itself is only about 60 metres high, and is therefore not visible from the mainland, except from positions close to the top of the cliff line. The stack is separated from the mainland cliffs by a sea-swept channel which is about five metres wide at its narrowest. The climbing is generally easy, however, the steepness of the approach, the crossing of the channel and the sometimes dubious nature of the rock make this a fairly serious outing. The ocean which crashes in and out of numerous channels also helps to add to the feeling of being in a big and wild place.

Immediately west of Cathedral Rock there is huge buttress which is still attached to the mainland. An impressive, sea tunnel runs east/west through the base of this feature.

About 800 metres to the east of Cathedral Rock, the Mlambomhulu River flows over a high waterfall directly into the sea. This area is known as Waterfall Bluff and commonly attracts day-trippers from surrounding establishments such as Mbotyi River Lodge.

Climbers on the common stance at the top of pitch 1. GAVIN RAUBENHEIMER



LEFT *Cathedral Rock*. GAVIN RAUBENHEIMER

RIGHT: *Hallam Payne on the tricky descent*. GAVIN RAUBENHEIMER

How to get there

Head for Flagstaff and then continue on to Lusikisiki. At the T-junction in Lusikisiki, turn right. Continue for about one kilometre and then, at a sign indicating, 'Mbotyi/Cathedral Rock/Waterfall Bluff', turn left onto a concrete road. Travel along the concrete road and past a jail on the left. After about six kilometres the road becomes dirt. Drive straight on and then, when the road forks, keep right at the sign, 'Luphuthana /Waterfall Bluff/Cathedral Rock'.

Travel on dirt for 12.5 kilometres then turn right at a secondary school with the name 'Mxhumej SS' painted in big letters on the roof. This small dirt road has no signboard at the time of writing. Follow this road for about 15 kilometres to Luphuthana, which is just a collection of private fishing cottages on the coast. The dirt roads are generally good, but can be very muddy in wet conditions. A vehicle with high ground clearance is recommended.

Approach

Leave your car at Luphuthana fishermen's cottages and ask one of the residents to look after your car. Cross the Luphuthana River to the west, at the point where it enters the sea adjacent to the houses. Walk westwards along a path towards Waterfall Bluff, passing 'Top Hat' after about two kilometres. This is an obvious but unusual rock feature in the surf zone. The waterfall is located on the Mlambomhulu River and is one of very few rivers in the world which plunges directly into the sea. There is an enormous cave on the east side of Waterfall Bluff with a great view of the falls, but it can be very windy and exposed for camping purposes. A path runs out the east side of the cave and then turns inland for about 800 metres on the true left-hand bank of the Mlambomhulu. Here it joins another path just before it crosses the Mlambomhulu River. Just upstream from the crossing point, in an idyllic setting, on the true right is Coxy's Cave. This convenient cave is located right next to the river. It has a low roof but can accommodate about six people. The large, deep, adjacent pool is ideal for swimming and the water is crystal clear.



LEFT: *Gavin Peckham approaching the first pitch.* GAVIN RAUBENHEIMER



RIGHT: *Cathedral Rock summit ridge, Gavin Peckham on the summit.* GAVIN RAUBENHEIMER

From Coxy's Cave select the cattle path that heads about WSW and a 20-minute walk brings one to a point overlooking the sea-stack. Not far from the cave, along the walk from Coxy's Cave to Cathedral Rock, there is a run-down one-roomed hut. It serves as a landmark but has no value as a shelter.

To be more specific, the sea-stack is located 900 metres west of Waterfall Bluff or 950 metres W-SW of Coxy's Cave. (31 degrees 26' 8" S, 29 degrees 49' 00" E)

(Note that, on the South African Government 1:50 000 maps, the stack marked as Cathedral Rock is actually Little Cathedral Rock. The main Cathedral Rock lies about 1½ kilometres further east.)

Alternative approach

It is also possible to hike in from Mbotyi village in the west. To do this, follow the signs from Lusikisiki and park near or inside the Mbotyi River Lodge, by prior arrangement. Then hike east along the beach, past Drew's Camp and up onto the hills beyond. A hike of about 10 kilometres gets one to Coxy's Cave and the sea-stack.

Approach from the shore to the base

The aim is to get down to the western base of the Cathedral Rock itself where there is a large, flat, two-stepped ledge. It is best to get to the base of the route about two hours before low-tide and to be back by two hours after. Spring low tide is obviously the best time to climb.

When standing on the shore above the sea-stack take a path to the west (right) which leads steeply down, then back left to an awkward exposed step-down on rocks. Then carry on diagonally down east for 50 metres. Find a semi-hidden traverse for 30 metres east which brings you to the top of a flat prow of rock jutting out over the channel below. Leave a fixed rope at this point and use it to abseil from blocks, down the crumbling arête for 15 metres to a small flat spot just above the channel. Abseil a further five metres down onto a huge, flat, jagged rock in the channel. This is about two metres above water level at spring low



Cathedral Rock topo. GAVIN RAUBENHEIMER

tide. Traverse around to the right to reach a large, flat, two-stepped ledge on the west side of the stack.

Route Descriptions

Normal Route

Pitch 1 10 50 m: This is probably the way the Cathedral Rock has been climbed in the past. Climb to the right of the arête and take the line of least resistance to the top.

West Arête

Pitch 1 10 35 m: Start from the middle of the western ledge and climb easy rock to a large stance below a prominent prow of rock.

Pitch 2 15 25 m: From here gain access to the sea-facing side of the arête by scrambling under the prow and up a small open book to a ledge (crux). From here climb the line of least resistance to a belay on a large table top just below the main summit.

First ascent: Thomas Mann, Hallam Payne, and Kerry Kee, 17 May 2014

West Arête – Left Face

Pitch 1 10 35 m: Start from the left-hand side of the western ledge and climb easy rock to a stance just left of a prominent prow of rock.

Pitch 2 14 25 m: From the stance, move a few metres left onto the landward face. Then step up into a higher, vegetated ledge and move 5 m left until it ends. From this point climb straight up passing just right of a rectangular roof. Continue up, then through an easy overhang to gain easy ground which is followed to a belay on a large table top just below the main summit.

First ascent: Gavin Raubenheimer, Gavin Peckham and André Dalais, 17 May 2014.

Abseils

From a block on the western end, abseil 30 m to below the prow. Then another 30 m from a thread belay to the ledge at the start of pitch 1.

Emergencies

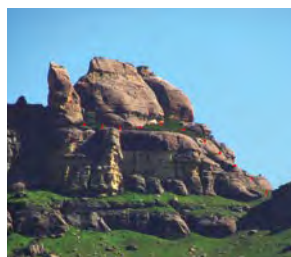
Phone 0800 005 133 and report that you have a 'mountain rescue'. Technical rescues in this area are usually carried out by rescue teams of the Mountain Club of South Africa, KZN Section and supported by helicopters of the SA Air Force's 15 Squadron in Durban.

Notes

- 1 It is unknown who made the first ascent of the Cathedral Rock.
- 2) A solo climber, Ilse Bodemer, fell to her death in July 2004, from under the rectangular roof on the second pitch of the Left Face. Her accident was caused by a handhold which broke.
- 3) There are plenty of other routes to be opened on the sea-stack itself and on the surrounding crags.
- 4) The whole of the coastline is made of rough sand-stone with very good friction. The quality and strength varies from acceptable to rotten. When getting down to the start of the sea stack, care must be taken on the scramble where there are patches of very rotten rock, especially the final ridge down to the sea channel. The sea-stack also has a few areas of bad rock.
- 5) The semi-hidden traverse on the way down is easy but exposed and it is advisable to use some sort of rope safety system.
- 6) Gear: A selection of cams in the medium to large range, a set of wired nuts, 4 long slings, 2 x half ropes or 1 x full rope, at least 1 x 50 m rope to be a fixed rope down into the sea channel.

THE SPOUT — A NEW ROUTE IN THE SOUTHERN DRAKENSBERG

GAVIN PECKHAM, HALLAM PAYNE AND JOHN CRUMLEY



Earlier this year, quite out of the blue, I received an email from an old climbing associate who had long since relocated to the Cape Town area. It turned out that John had sneaked back for a brief foray to his old haunts in KwaZulu-Natal and had opened what he hoped was a new route on Garden Castle. His e-mail included a route description. He asked if I knew of any previous ascents and whether I still acted as a repository for new route information in the Berg. I was able to inform John that, not only was it indeed a new route but, as far as I could tell, it was the only recorded rock climb on Garden Castle.

John's new route was particularly intriguing to me as I had spent much of my youth fishing the waters of the Mzimude River which meanders along the base of the mountain. During that time we had made numerous ascents of Garden Castle and scrambled around all over the mountain exploring the assorted delights that the various gullies, ridges and outcrops had to offer. This was, however, long before I started rock climbing and the thought of scaling any of the sheer sandstone faces had never even entered my head. The stunning view of the mountain from our cottage stoep was an enduring youthful memory. A part of that impressive skyline was a prominent free-standing pillar known locally as *The Spout* – it being attached to a large domelike structure known as The Kettle.

John's email, route description and accompanying photo triggered these memories and were sufficient motivation for me to put aside my cup of milky tea, throw off my knee blanket, stagger out of my recliner and try to recruit a partner in crime who was young enough and strong enough to carry most of the gear and help me get my aging body up the route. My good friend, Hallam Payne, drew the short straw.

Our chance came quite unexpectedly some months ago. A party of our canoeing friends had booked a chalet at the Castleburn Resort for an upcoming canoe race on the Umzimkulu River and we were fortunate enough to be included in

The Spout seen to left in photo. HALLAM PAYNE



Garden Castle as seen from the Castleburn Resort, showing The Spout (LH arrow) and the nek at the start of the final approach (RH arrow). HALLAM PAYNE

the party. It caused a few raised eyebrows when Hallam and I announced that we would not be paddling, but would be making an attempt on The Spout instead. And we did.

Early on the appointed day, the paddlers headed down to the river, whilst Hallam and I headed up the initially gentle slopes of the mountain. I soon realised that a direct approach up the very steep slope to the nek near the start of the route would probably induce a heart attack, so Hallam patiently accompanied me on a much longer, gentler approach that essentially followed the Giant's Cup Hiking Trail up to a lower-lying nek over the western, 'tail' end of the mountain. We then cut back eastwards along the skyline, skirting a couple of huge outcrops on the way. Numerous tiny streams, an assortment of summer flowers, panoramic views and a troop of baboons on the summit ridge helped take our minds off the rather arduous walk-in.

The final approach to the route is outlined in the description below; and so it was that we found ourselves ensconced at the start of the route. Sadly, this bore little resemblance to John's route description. Whilst Hallam explored the various possibilities, I collapsed in a patch of shade, gasping like a beached whale. With little hope that we were in fact at the start of the first pitch, Hallam volunteered to grovel up a vegetated groove to the top of a huge boulder and see if things might become more apparent from there. And indeed they did. Hallam quickly brought me up to a huge rock platform from which we had a clear view



The final approach to the start of the route. HALLAM PAYNE

of the magnificent crack that formed the crux of the second pitch. My hand-picked rope-gun led this pitch with, it must be said, a good deal of huffing and puffing – although with relative ease compared to the way in which I thrutched up after him. This pitch left me so exhausted that I prevailed upon Hallam to lead on to the summit, or rather the highest sensible point, the true summit being about one metre higher at the far end of an unprotectable, razor-edged blade of rock.

After a few minutes spent taking in the amazing, 360-degree panorama we strategised our descent. Neither of us liked the look of John's second abseil off a chicken head which we had passed on our way up. The chicken head on the summit, however, looked good. I managed to secure a solid back-up and we then discovered, to our mutual delight, that the ropes reached all the way down to the start of the route.

We walked out by essentially the same route we had taken on our approach. For me, it had been an exhausting day. Porter Payne had carried most of the gear and done all the leading whilst Passenger Peckham had done little more than grace the second ascent of this excellent route with his presence.

Thanks to John and son for opening this fine route and to Hallam for rendering hospice services to the aged. Our modified version of John's original route description follows:

The Spout – Garden Castle

Approach: Various approaches are possible. The aim is to get to the nek on the skyline immediately to the west (Berg side) of The Kettle and The Spout. (See photo.) There is currently a large cairn on this nek. From the nek, make your way up a narrow, grassy line between two slabs to reach the base of another large, sloping slab. Scramble up this to reach a large, bushy ledge. Bushwhack your way leftwards across this ledge which, towards its far end, narrows to barely a metre. At this point there is a huge drop off which is partly obscured by vegetation – take care crossing it. From here the ledge broadens again to provide a wide, safe stance at the base of The Spout. On the right, there is a big tree in a huge recess with a wide crack at the back. The rather uninspiring start of the route is about 5 m left of this at a vegetated crack between two small, slabby faces. This vegetated crack is the only part of the route that is actually visible from the start.

The Climb:

All the pitches are of the order of 20+ m in length.

Pitch 1 13: Stem up between the two small, slabby faces for about 5 m until it is possible to step across onto the right-hand slab and climb easily up to the top. Climb the short, easy chimney on the right to reach a stance on a large, rock platform. There is essentially no gear, but since the only tricky moves are low down, this is not really a problem.

Pitch 2 17: Climb the excellent, right-tending crack line which is slightly overhanging towards the top. The only chock stone is solid and much fist jamming is required. A very cramped stance for two climbers is possible at the top of the crack. However, unless it is necessary to keep a close eye on your second, it is probably better to continue by traversing out left onto the face and slightly down (unprotected but very easy) to reach a narrow rock ledge which is just visible from the tiny stance at the top of the crack.

Move left for a metre or two along this ledge until it is possible to climb straight up on easy rock and make a stance several metres to the right of the base of a short, left-sloping ramp. A goodly number of medium and large cams is recommended for the crack although it is possible to use a smaller number and walk them up. This is a superb pitch.

Pitch 3 13: Climb the short ramp on the left. Continue up diagonally left past a prominent chicken head/horn which may still have some old ab cord on it. Follow the easiest line up to the top. This involves easy climbing on good rock but there is virtually no gear after the chicken head.

Descent:

A 45 m ab off a prominent chicken head at the right-hand end of the summit ridge gets you back to the start of the route.

Opening party: John and Cai Crumley, January 2014

KLIPKLOOF – THE CANYON OF DREAMS

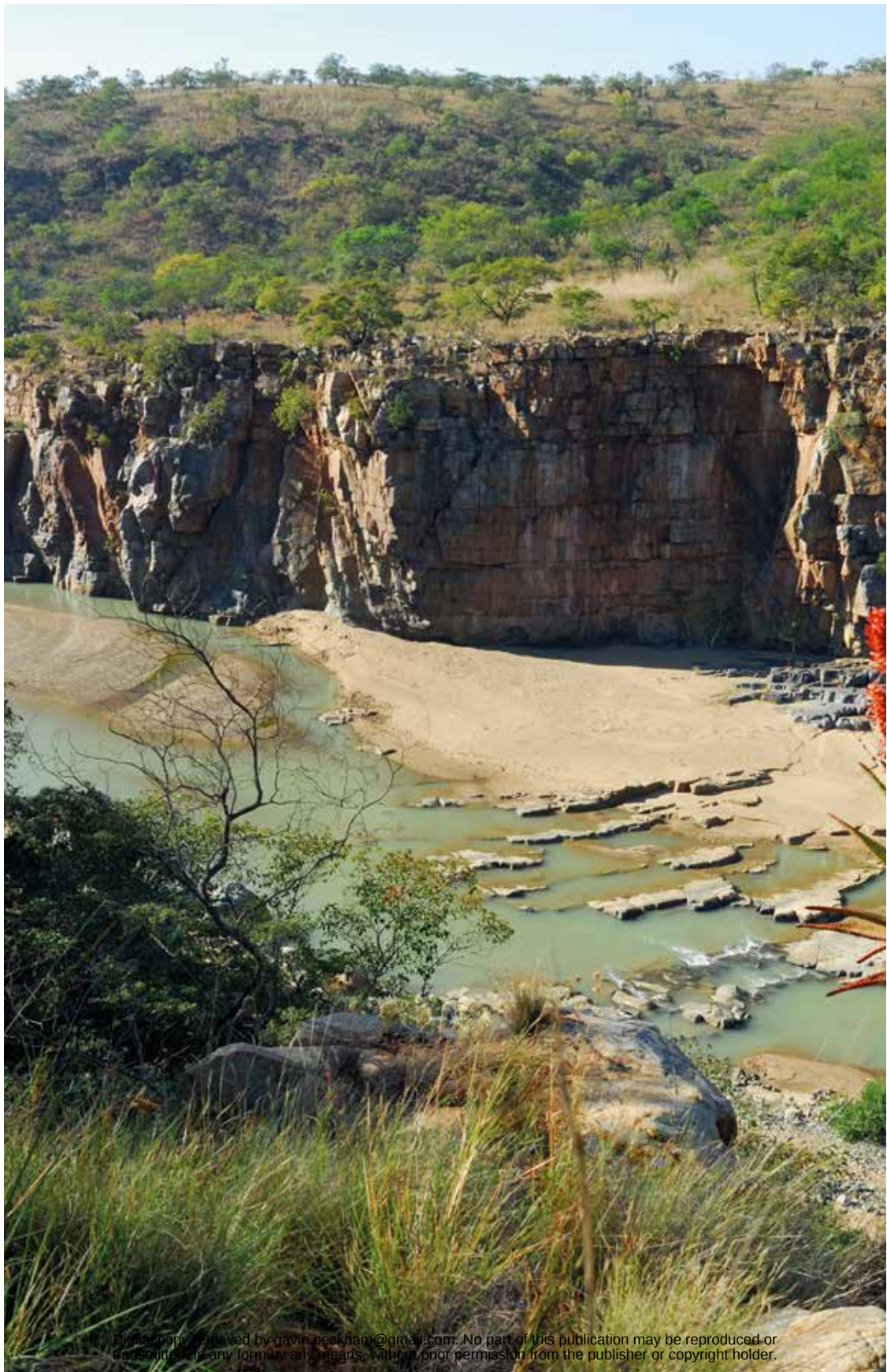
GAVIN PECKHAM



Rock climbing at Klipkloof farm, on the banks of the White Umfolozi River, has attracted climbers for many decades. The spectacular gorge contains almost 300 routes, about half trad, half sport and mostly in the moderate grades. The well-known Cape climber Tony Lourens was sufficiently inspired to give the venue a nine-page, full-colour spread in his magazine, *SA Mountain*, and to compliment the venue by entitling his article 'The Canyon of Dreams'.

The owner, Mr Gerhard Greef, must rate as one of the most 'climber friendly' landowners that we have been privileged to know. He has always gone out of his way to make us feel welcome at this magnificent climbing venue. Sadly, he has now found it necessary to sell the property. Fortunately the new owners are also climber friendly and we thus continue to enjoy the privilege of access to this superb climbing venue. For any further details, or a copy of a 160-page route guide in PDF format, please feel free to contact me by e-mail at: gavin.peckham@gmail.com.

During the many years of Mr Greef's ownership, the guestbook in the main chalet elicited a veritable wealth of flattering comments from climbers all around the country as well as from climbers from far flung places around the planet. On the inside cover of the guestbook Mr Greef penned a verse that gave expression to his deep love for this place that was so close to his heart. With his permission this verse is reproduced below.



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KLIPKLOOF

GERHARD GREEF

*Waar helder strome blink
waar koedoe water drink
waar blare in die water sink
waar luiperdspore in die modder versink –
dit is my plek.*

*Waar water aan die rotse spoel
en mosvingers oor die klippe voel,
die wurgvy sy kloue in die skeure druk
en orgideewortels om die bome klou,
die oggendkoelte jou betas
en van alle sonde was –
dit is my plek.*

*Waar die spinnerak onder stof
sy pêrels wys, en die arend op die winde gly.
Waar raasblaar, aalwyn en blinkblaar blom,
die bobbejaan met skorre stem sy vrese besweer,
die patrys met geroeste geskal die son begroet
en die groenvlekduifie sy gebed begin.
My hart maak doe, doe-doe,
doe-de-do-do-do-do –
dit is my plek.*

Acknowledgement:

The assistance of Jeanette Ferreira van Jaarsveld in transcribing this verse is greatly appreciated.

LEFT: *Warrior Wall – just one of the many superb faces that make this magnificent venue so attractive.*

ANTHONY VAN TONDER



Just a glimpse of what is on offer at the Canyon of Dreams. ANTHONY VAN TONDER



Hansie van Rooyen climbing Relative Youth (19) White Umfolozi River. ANTHONY VAN TONDER



Climbers on Day Tripper (17), Power Wall, Canyon of Dreams. ANTHONY VAN TONDER



White Umfolozi Reflections. ANTHONY VAN TONDER



A further glimpse of the Canyon of Dreams. ANTHONY VAN TONDER

Drakensberg PIONEER LEAVES TOWN

words & pics by
TONY LOURENS

It's true to say that the wonderful world of climbing certainly has its generous slice of unique and eccentric characters. And in South Africa we are not in short supply!

And so it was, on the last weekend of October this year, a bunch of Natalian climbers, interspersed with a handful of climbers from Cape Town and Jo'burg, gathered at one of KwaZulu Natal's most beguiling and beautiful climbing areas, the White Umfolozi (WUMF to most of us), in the heart of Zululand, to bid farewell to one of KZN's more colourful mountaineering and climbing characters, Gavin Peckham.

Gavin started climbing relatively late in life, but that only fuelled his insatiable passion for exploration in the majestic Drakensberg mountains, and also the many sport and trad crags scattered around KZN and further afield.

During his 'tenure', Gavin visited and climbed in the 'Berg countless times, climbing many of the existing routes and peaks, and putting up numerous new climbs with various partners.

His appetite for new routing was unstoppable. He bolted many new lines at Harrismith and other crags, but perhaps his most favourite place, and where he has put up an inordinate number of sport and trad lines is at his beloved White Umfolozi – The Canyon of Dreams. And you only have to go there once to feel the magnetism and energy of this climbing paradise on the banks of the White Umfolozi River, and you will undoubtedly return, as I have, making the long pilgrimage from Cape Town time and time again.





One of the impressive things about Gavin's bolting is that besides putting up some of the best routes at WUMF, he has also put up piles of easy beginner routes, mostly at his own cost, so that kids and beginners can also experience the awesomeness of this special place. And Gavin is always willing to give his time to introduce people to the sport, patiently putting up ropes and coaxing beginners up their first routes. And if that's not enough, he also penned guidebooks to the Harrismith crags and the White Umfolozi. All this while holding down a demanding job as a Chemistry lecturer at Zululand University.

Besides his vast experience as a climber, Gavin is also a keen fly fisherman and has an acerbic, lightening quick wit that many of us have been on the receiving end of, but always in good nature and never with a barbed tongue. His sarcastic one-liners are legendary. I recall quite clearly a few years back, climbing at WUMF – I was on a route that had a tricky sequence near the top. I was trying to work it out, and in doing so I was moving off to left.



Obviously a little too far, 'cause I heard Gavin's voice floating up from the ground: 'Hey Tony, if you move any further left, you will be able to see Sydney Opera House!' Everybody fell about laughing of course, and I got the hint and quickly moved back right and eventually finished the route. But that is Gavin to a T!

Anyway, back to the farewell weekend: Some of us arrived early in the week to make the most of the spectacular climbing, but most arrived on the Friday, and headed down to the river for a day of cragging. Everyone then congregated at the campsite afterwards to enjoy a typical WUMF evening – big fire, lots of food and even more drink.

The following day, everyone scattered to different areas, some nursing hangovers, others not rising till the noonday sun was directly above, and some just chilling. But none-the-less, just about everybody having a full days' climbing, then dragging our aching, but satisfied bodies back to camp for the final night's activities.

Unbeknown to Gavin, the evening's proceedings involved him being dressed



up as Hugh Hefner replete with silky gown and cigar, and the girls all parading around in bunny girl costumes. By the permanent grin on Gavin's face, he was obviously delighted with his entourage, and very little encouragement was needed for him to play his part to the full.

So the evening progressed, and after many cases of beer, boxes of wine, a few bottles of harder stuff, and many golden oldie classics, one by one we threw in the towel and snuck off to bed.

And so, it is with a sad heart that I and many of his comrades and long-time climbing partners, will be saying goodbye to Gavin and his wife Barbara, as they, due to personal reasons, have decided to move across to the UK to live out their retirement years.

Gavin, you crusty old codger, I am sure I am speaking for all of us when I say that you will be sorely missed at the crags – your enthusiasm, your kindness, and your legendary wit. WUMF will just not be the same without you!

